



RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 11

Er Mu

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

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Synopsis

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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Chapter 1001: Unusual Stone Fragment

Buffeted by wind and snow, Azima crossed the street and entered the Castle District.

Although it was strange to send for her at this hour of the night, as Azima trusted Wendy, she had agreed to follow her to the castle. Meanwhile, she had left Doris behind, who had insisted on coming with her.

This way, she could keep her friend out of trouble in case anything happened.

Shivering under her clothes, Azima held herself tightly as she reached the castle gate.

"Are you cold?" Wendy glanced at her smilingly. "Don't worry. You'll soon need to take off your coat once you get in."

Hang on... take off?

Is His Majesty planning to...

"Please enter, Ms. Wendy." While Azima was still in a shock, the gate slowly opened and the guard ushered them in. "His Majesty is in the study. I'm afraid I have to stop here as I still have duties to attend to."

"Thank you." Wendy nodded. She held Azima's hand and led her into the castle.

In a split second, wisps of warm air drove all the coldness away.

So... this is the heating system.

Although Azima knew that the castle was equipped with a brand new heating system and thus did not require wood heating, the actual experience was still very impressive.

The servants in the castle were all wearing light clothes. She could see people wearing shirts and dresses everywhere. At one corner of the dining room, she even spied some barefoot witches

running across the hall on the carpeted floor. The castle was as warm as summer. Awestruck by the luxurious living conditions in the castle, Azima started to suspect that Roland was probably just a hopeless hedonist.

"He just built Neverwinter for his own pleasure!" Azima thought to herself.

Wendy, on the other hand, had already taken off her coat. She winked at Azima and said, "You'll start sweating if you keep your coat on. Plus, It's freezing out there. You'll catch a cold if you go back out all sweaty."

"O-OK."

Azima unbuttoned her coat in a stiff manner. She peered down at her chest. Her chest was not flat by any means, but it was obviously incomparable to Wendy's prodigious bosom.

If His Majesty really intended to seek out pleasures of the flesh... Azima believed she should be the last person Roland would think of.

With self-mockery, Azima followed Wendy to the third floor and into the lord's study.

"Your Majesty, Azima is here."

"Your Majesty."

Azima bowed. She surveyed the people in the room out of the corner of her eyes, finally rested her gaze on the gray-haired man behind the desk.

Azima suddenly realized that the man opposite her was the King of Graycastle. She only had a glimpse of him at the banquet. At the time, she had still been working for the Sleeping Spell. Now that she had the opportunity to have a close look at the king, she was astonished at how young he appeared.

Azima doubted that a person under 30 was capable of defeating

all his siblings, ascending the throne, uprooting the church, and conquering all the other kingdoms.

She could challenge Tilly's authority but she obviously couldn't speak to Roland in the same fashion. Once she left Neverwinter, she could not come back to the Sleeping Spell again. The whole kingdom was under Roland's control. Everybody was under Roland's rule, unless they fled Graycastle. Although she didn't fear the power and authority of others, Doris and the other witches were not as fearless as her.

"Please rise," The king replied good-naturedly. "In fact, I've to see you for a long time. Sorry for asking you to come here at this late hour, but I couldn't wait to meet you. Your ability means a great deal to the kingdom. Since the time has come, I didn't want to wait any longer."

"..." Azima looked up in surprise. "Are you saying that you're going to hire me?"

It seemed to be a special recruitment. For jobs which required witches' abilities, the Witch Union would usually offer greater compensation.

Meanwhile, Azima wondered what the "time" that Roland was referring to was.

"Yes... I would like to offer you a contract with very competitive compensation." Roland raised his cup and had a sip. "Two gold royals per month until you complete your task. After the completion of the project, you'll be paid an additional 50 gold royals. How does that sound?"

Azima's heart skipped a beat. Even without that additional 50 gold royals, the monthly salary was already as lucrative as the remuneration paid by the Sleeping Spell. She would not only be able to sustain herself with this income but could also help her friends! As for the extra reward of 50 gold royals, she could either use it to start her new life or purchase a bigger house for her

relative Whitepear.

This was exactly what she needed at the moment!

However, years of vagrant life had also made her fully aware that there was no free meal in the world. Nobles were experts in games of deception. They usually provided their victims with empty promises of future rewards. Even if this noble was the sovereign of the state, Azima had to be careful. At this thought, she answered, "It's a high compensation, but I want to know what you want me to do before giving you my answer."

Her ability was very helpful for wilderness survival, and she had relied on it a lot to locate water sources, animals' lairs and fruit, none of which, however, were in shortage in Neverwinter.

"Your job is very simple, I want you to find a stone for me"." Roland produced a box from his drawer and opened it on the desk. "It shouldn't be a problem for you."

"Can I take a look?"

"Of course."

Azima walked up to the box and put the stone in her hand. It was about the size of her thumb, pretty thin, smooth and cold, more like a strange coin than a stone. Apparently, it had been carefully polished. In a color of a grayish black, it did not look special, so Azima did not understand why His Majesty showed so much interest in it.

She hesitated for a moment and said, "It's hard for me to trace the origin of a stone. When I was on Sleeping Island, a Chamber of Commerce once hired me to look for the source of some gems, but my ability led them to Searing Flame Island. There was nothing except hot dry sand. Because of this, the Sleeping Spell didn't earn anything but instead, had to compensate them for the expenses incurred on the trip."

"I think the sand was bauxite. You can call it the origin of gems

because they are made of the same material." Roland chuckled carelessly. "As for whether you can find what I want, you can test it out now."

Azima wondered if the black stone was also a type of gem. She applied her ability to the stone fragment as Roland had instructed. Instantly, a jet of blinding green light escaped from her palm and almost entirely blocked her vision! The glow was as vibrant and bright as the lights in the castle!

Suddenly, another green flash burst forth from the king's desk. Azima stood agape.

The flash was only visible to her. It could tell her not only where the source material was, but also much there was. Most of the time, the green light was scattered around, flickering like fireflies. As the glints continuously merged, Azima could see where they led.

Azima understood that it was perfectly normal for Roland to hide the other part of the stone fragment in the desk, as a way to test her ability, but she was surprised at the intensity of the light beam. It meant these lusterless stone fragments were source class materials!

It was her first time seeing such a small source material!

How... can that be possible?

Before she had moved to Sleeping Island, she had found a gold royal on the street by accident. At the time, she had been thinking of using her ability to collect coins that slipped out of people's pockets, but since it was a one in a million chance, she hadn't had much luck. Although she had known people usually kept money in their pockets, she had had no way to get them. However, she had learned where most of the money was stored.

At that time, she had sensed the strongest reaction from the treasury underneath the lord's castle. The current green flash, nevertheless, was as intense, and blinding, as the light back then!

"Is this stone... even more precious than gold?" Azima wondered.

Chapter 1002: A Race against Time

After a long silence, Azima took a deep breath, pointed to Roland's desk and said, "There's a stone made of the same material in your drawer."

"Correct." Roland returned Azima a satisfied smile and put the other box on the desk. "But I'm a bit curious. Why did you call it 'a stone made of the same material' instead of 'an identical one'?"

"Because... the reactions were different. Although they're both source materials, the reaction of the first one is stronger." Azima then described what she had seen.

"Can you locate more pieces?"

"Please let me try."

Azima concentrated her mind and found the green light. Due to the blinding interference of the previous two stones, she had overlooked the other lights, but soon Azima found three more lines extending east, west, and north. This implied there were, at the very least, three stones made of the same source material which were bigger than the one in her hand. To her dismay, she noticed the three lines, although thick, actually consisted of numerous dim thin threads.

After Azima reported to Roland, he nodded thoughtfully and said, "In other words, you won't know how far these stones are unless you actually go there."

"Yes."

"In that case, go to the east and then head to the north." Roland immediately made the decision. "It's too dangerous to travel west, as you have to cross the Barbarian Land. If you still can't find the stone when you reach the beach, then head north."

After a moment of hesitation, Azima asked what she had been thinking all this time. "Your Majesty, is this stone... even more

precious than gold?"

Since Azima was not a combat witch, she had limited self-defense skills. Azima was concerned that, if news of this precious stone was leaked, the trip would put her in danger. In that case, she would not only fail her mission but also lose her life on the way.

Seeing that Azima was worried about the potential risk, the young king replied smilingly, "In fact, it's yes and no. For people who don't know what it really is, it's just a plain, useless stone. But to me, it's much more valuable than gold. It's the key to the success of the 'Resplendent Radiation' Project."

"Resplendent Radiation? What's that?" Azima wondered, feeling even more confused.

"However, considering the possible variables, I would certainly not let you go alone." Roland pointed to a guard next to him. "This is Sean, your protector. Furthermore, a combat engineer unit from the First Army would come with you. Your top priority is to locate the stones. Therefore, you can instruct Sean to liaison with the local officials to assist your search if necessary."

"Are you saying... that I can make those lords work for me?" Azima asked in surprise.

"Why not?" Roland shrugged. "They aren't who they used to be. They're obligated to obey orders from the central government." Roland paused for a few seconds and continued. "Since it may take a while to find the source material, I can pay you 30% of the salary in advance and the rest on a monthly basis. That is all for the contract. What are your thoughts on this?"

Azima pondered for a while and asked, "Your Majesty, could you direct the payment to Doris?"

"I have no issue with this," Roland raised his eyebrows, "if that's what you want."

"Then I'll take the job." She bowed. "I'll be ready by tomorrow

morning."

Although there were still many things she did not understand, at least... she didn't have to worry about money anymore. Azima couldn't see any problems with the task and believed she would sooner or later locate the stones with the assistance of the First Army. With the 50 gold royals, life would be much easier for her friends, Azima could not wait to tell Doris the good news.

"Very well." Roland got to his feet. "I look forward to hearing the good news."

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After Wendy escorted Azima out, Roland paced back to the French window and sighed deeply while watching the city night below.

"Finally, we've got the ball rolling."

"To create a sun?" asked Nightingale as she revealed herself from the Mist. "You get super excited every time you talk about this project."

"Because it's a path to the sun," Roland remarked impressively. "As of this moment, mankind has entered a new era, an era where we produce our own sun rather than simply admiring it. To me, nothing can be more romantic than such enormous progress." Roland turned around and pointed up at the ceiling. "Do you see a yellow exclamation mark up there?"

Nightingale shook her head in great amusement. "I only see a mumbling daydreamer, in his perfect... delirium."

"Ahem..." Roland was almost choked. "Hey, do you have to be so straightforward about it?"

"I'm just trying to be honest with you." Nightingale jerked away her head, putting on an innocent look.

Roland shot her a stare, half annoyed and half amused. He knew

Nightingale was joking. In fact, most people would think he was crazy until they actually saw the finished product.

Even Roland himself didn't have the slightest idea of whether this project would succeed or not.

Roland wouldn't have developed such an unrealistic idea had there been no witches. The Manhattan Project, even in the modern society, had cost so much money, manpower, and resources that even the most developed country had found it difficult to afford such monstrous expenses. It would be absolute madness to try and replicate the Manhattan Project from scratch. However, with the assistance of the various magic powers, he might succeed.

The most distinctive characteristic of his project was the minimal investment it required, as the witches would complete most of the work. Although it sounded like a joke, to produce a nuclear bomb with almost none of the accompanying modern technology, there was still a chance that it might work.

Roland could certainly carry out the project concurrently with the other industrial projects at this stage of development. Even if it did not go well, it would just be a small failure.

In fact, Roland had started to prepare for this project since the day Lucia entered adulthood. After revisiting all the elements on the periodic table, he had asked Kyle Sichi, the Chief Alchemist, to separate Uranium samples from a bunch of extracted elementary substances and store them away.

Uranium was one of the most common elements in nature. It could not only be found in uranium mines but also in granite, coal, and even seawater. Only, due to the limitations of the current technology, it would cost an exorbitant amount, in both time and money, to properly exploit any uranium deposits. However, Lucia could use her ability to directly collect scattered uranium in nature to provide the raw materials required. It thus saved Roland the trouble of separating and purifying the uranium.

Roland knew his eloquent rhetoric in the meeting was simply a political strategy, designed to raise people's morale. Because he had actually left something unsaid. The ambitious dream of creating a sun was just one, surface level reason, for him putting this plan into action. Another, more important reason, was that humanity was now facing the greatest crisis since its genesis, based on what he had learned from the Senior Demon.

What's the origin of the magic power?

Roland did not have the faintest idea.

He took this irrational, unknown power very seriously.

According to the Senior Demon, the demons evolved through upgrades. That was the reason they had evolved so quickly over the past 400 years.

Agatha's proposal of defending seemed to be perfect, but there was actually a massive flaw. Under this plan, the enemies would have as much time as they needed, which is probably why the Union suffered such a complete defeat.

If the demons were left alone, defeated the undersea monsters during the third Battle of Divine Will, and once again upgraded themselves, how powerful would they become?

Since the demons could upgrade themselves with their magic power in such an inconceivable manner, Roland had to develop a more aggressive, powerful, and devastating countermeasure as his last resort.

Chapter 1003: New Progress

"Why do you look so serious?" Nightingale broke into a smile. "I'll believe anything you say, but you ought to give me some time to absorb the information. Nobody would believe this tiny little thing can decimate thousands of demons, especially when they saw the actual substance extracted by Lucia."

"Do I?" Roland stroked his cheeks. Perhaps he became nervous when he realized that this was a race against time that would determine the very survival of humanity. "You're right though. I can hardly believe in something until I've seen it myself."

Roland turned around and held the tiny "stone fragment" in his hand.

This would be the starting point of harnessing the power of the atom — purified uranium.

It was hard to convince people that the little stone could produce "something as glorious as the sun". The silver-white surface of the uranium sample had lost its shine due to oxidation. It felt cold to the touch and seemed to have nothing to do with heat or the sun. But Roland knew it would produce amazing results under the right conditions.

To collect uranium, Lucia and Spear had spent nearly a week at the North Slope Mine extracting uranium from the crushed granite. Because of this, the Countess had complained quite a bit. She thought it was inappropriate to subject a lady to such heavy labor. As a compensation, she took five apprentices from Neverwinter's city hall for her own region's city hall.

And in the end, they had only got this tiny piece.

Compared to the original samples, this thumb-sized metal piece had a purity of over 90% and consisted of two layers. One layer was Uranium-235 and the other Uranium-238, in a ratio of 1 to 99. This

was also the ratio commonly existing in nature.

In other words, the uranium on the surface of the stone, as thin as it was, could be used to produce a "weapon".

As a stable element, both uranium-238 and uranium-235 had a half-life of 10 billion years. Uranium-238 was the predominant isotope but had little practical use, whereas uranium-235 could be used for creating nuclear weapons. Because of their extreme low radioactivity, the alpha particles emitted by uranium radionuclides during their decay could only travel a few dozen microns, not even far enough to penetrate the epidermis of a person's skin. Therefore, the stone would not cause radiation poisoning even if one held it in his hand.

But this did not mean that uranium with a high concentration was absolutely safe.

The alpha particles produced during the decay were highly toxic. Once they entered the body through contaminated food, it could be disastrous.

Due to this, Roland had asked Soraya to coat the "stone fragment" with a transparent film, not only to prevent it from further oxidizing, but also to protect people from the radiation.

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Roland had mixed feelings about the stone in his hand. Uranium, which contained so much potential power, lay innocently in his hand, looking almost different than iron. No wonder Pasha and the other witches didn't believe him.

Now that he had made it this far, the next thing he needed to do was to collect the raw materials for the "Resplendent Radiation" Project.

Azima's discovery of low purity uranium through a high purity sample told Roland that he could use the current sample to find more uranium mines. Although Roland could ask Lucia to extract

uranium at a mining site and thus obtain sufficient uranium-235, such an arrangement would sabotage his initial plan of conducting multiple projects simultaneously.

Because Lucia also played an irreplaceable role in the smelting industry.

Besides, it was impossible to produce an atom bomb with only uranium. To create atomic weapons, Roland had to utilize a very rare element which was usually found with uranium, but in far smaller amounts. Therefore, even though Lucia could help him extract uranium, he still needed a large amount of the raw ore before he could build a bomb.

For that, Azima was the key.

Roland put the tiny piece of uranium back in a box and locked it in a drawer. Then he pulled out the unfinished sketch of an internal combustion engine from the stack of documents on his desk and spread it out.

Unlike most of the residents in Neverwinter who usually went to bed early on a snowy winter night, Roland still had a lot of work to do.

"Staying up late again?" Nightingale asked as she tilted her head.

Roland stretched and then picked up a quill. "We are marching down the path to victory. If you want your name to be passed down throughout history, you have to make at least some small sacrifices, right?"

"Really? But you seem a little reluctant."

"Ahem... don't you believe what I'm saying?"

"Yes, but you also asked me to detect lies with my ability." Nightingale shot back, with her tongue out.

"Oh well... then I'll say that I'm very willing to get this thing done. Are you happy now?" Roland replied resignedly. "I don't

want to lose to the demons or the so-called Divine Will."

"Good, now you are telling the truth. I'll prepare you a cup of hot tea and some snacks." Nightingale smiled. "I'll ask the kitchen staff to prepare spicy barbecue, juicy mushrooms, deep fried shrimps seasoned with salt and pepper, and Chaos Drinks. How does that sound?"

"Hey, you're just ordering what you want, aren't you?" thought Roland.

Roland shook his head, totally speechless. "Order whatever you like."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Nightingale said slyly.

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The next day, Azima took the high purity uranium fragment with her and set off. Meanwhile, Roland received a piece of good news from City Hall.

The Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Industry had completed the construction of Fractionation Tower I.

To show how important the project was, Roland personally attended the unveiling ceremony.

The tower was located by the Redwater River in Neverwinter's industrial zone. Standing almost 25 meters high, the tower incorporated many new concepts and technology. Divided into several sections, the tower separated oils and liquids with different boiling points. After Anna took care of the welding work, the chemists were now able to more precisely control the fractionation process.

While a simple boiler would be sufficient to separate oils, the quality of the final products obtained using such crude methods was far from satisfactory. This reminded Roland of a geology book he had read as a kid. The book had made him believe that his country was sitting on an enormous fortune in metal and mineral

resources, but after growing up, he realized those many of those minerals were simply raw materials with a low purity rate.

Like people's physical appearances, minerals varied. The difference between low and high-quality minerals was huge. Low-quality minerals required a lot of work before they could be used. The same held true for oils. Untreated oils that had impurities like waxes, sulfur or mineral salts, were as thick as mud and were therefore unusable. They had to refine them in order for them to become useful. Some oils, such as those from the oil fields in Borneo, were purer than most and could be directly used as fuel.

The Blackwater River that spread across nearly half of the Southernmost Region belonged to the latter category.

After Roland learned that there were gushers in the desert, he started to pay particular attention to that area. It turned out that the oil collected from Endless Cape was of fairly high quality. While not comparable to the refined oil in his original world, after basic fractionation, the oil met Roland's current needs.

The real advancement was the continued improvement of Neverwinter's industrial infrastructure.

Chapter 1004: The World in Her Eyes

The smelting zone was the most industrialized area in Neverwinter. The entire production process, from transportation to feeding raw materials into the smelters, was powered by steam engines.

The plant processed a large quantity of crude oil and coal every day. It covered a huge rectangular area, with the port and a coal storage yard on the north side of the Redwater River. Several conveyor belts, driven by steam engines, continuously fed coal to the boiler room. The parallel black lines on the conveyor belts exhibited a sharp contrast with the gray concrete pavement.

The other end of the facility was designed to store and process the crude oil from Shallow Beach.

The construction of the oil storage warehouses on the west side of the fractionator was now half-completed. Completely different from the design of the residential buildings across the river, the warehouses stood in a solid line like impregnable fortresses, but looked surprisingly attractive. Despite their plain exterior, the warehouses were installed with advanced equipment and designs such as decompression valves, inspection windows, carrier pipes, antistatic devices, etc. As the construction teams had gained a lot of experience from the construction of the chemical plant, the whole construction process had gone very smoothly.

Roland was extremely satisfied that the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Industry had done all the design work. All he had done was the final review and approval. Needless to say, the staff of these two Ministries had learned a lot from the previous mining and furnace projects. They had apparently applied what they had learned to this new project. Since Roland had yet to establish a set of industry standards, the workers had to confirm the parameters of each individual machine or part before it was sent to the plant for manufacturing. This showed that the workers

had already developed reading and writing skills and learned the basics of engineering; otherwise, it would be hard for the two departments to communicate effectively.

Two years after its implementation, this was the first great success to show the effectiveness of Roland's mandatory universal education.

As the temperature of the boiler increased, vaporized oil flowed into the fractionation tower and melted the snow clinging to it. The wind had ceased howling, but the snow still persisted. Nevertheless, spectators gazed at this beautiful metal tower without a blinking. Their breath misted in the cold air and mixed with the steam being ejected from all types of machinery on the square, heating up the cold winter air.

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"So beautiful," Edith muttered as she stood on the steel bridge.

The smelting zone was a few miles away from the bridge, so there were fewer spectators here, only some occasional passers-by. They were all hurrying to the high tower to witness the new wonder and meet the king. However, almost everyone slowed as they rushed past the Pearl of the Northern Region and the girl next to her. Apparently, the two ladies in the snow attracted a lot of attention.

"Isn't that just a chimney? What's the beauty of that?" Cole grumbled silently. "If you wanted to see it, why didn't you go with the people from city hall? Sir Barov reserved a spot for you, and His Majesty..."

Although the bridge was at a high point in the city, giving a wide view, it was too far away for them to get a close look. As all the officials from city hall were going to see the tower, it would have been a perfect opportunity to network with Edith's co-workers. Essentially, the whole point of this event was to connect with people instead of appreciating the magnificence of the tower. Just like a first-class banquet, nobles didn't care as much about the

food, but about who they dined with.

As a seasoned diplomat, Edith should have known the trick better than anyone else. She had promised to help Cole build his relationship with other city hall officers, yet she had just let such an excellent opportunity slip through the cracks. Sometimes, Cole felt he had a really hard time understanding his sister's thinking.

But seeing Edith purse her lips, Cole sensibly shut up.

"Because of you, my dear little brother." Edith jested in a soft voice. "Do you really want to appear in front of all the other officials in this outfit?"

Hold on, you made me wear this!

It was not a big deal to dress up like a girl at home, but Cole had not expected that he would be forced to wear women's clothing outside. If some of his friends saw him dressed up like a doll, he would probably jump off the bridge.

Alas! Cole could only blame himself. One day when he had been trying on Edith's clothes, his sister had caught him. Fearing that Edith would tell his little secret to someone else, Cole had no choice but to comply.

When Cole was about to, somebody whistled behind him.

As his face flushed red, he instantly lowered his head.

"Well, this isn't the right way to handle this kind of situation."

Edith grabbed Cole by the chin, forcing her brother to raise his head.

Next Cole saw the Pearl of the Northern Region sweep her gaze over the stranger with the condescension and nonchalance of an uninterested aristocrat. It was a glance that froze a person to the bone. Cole shuddered at his sister's icy look. The stranger stumbled back. Without a word, he scurried off and disappeared from their sights.

"Got it?" Edith shrugged. "This is also a test for you."

"... If I was wearing my usual outfit, I wouldn't have had such trouble." Cole mumbled quietly.

"But there will be many things you'll encounter in the future, some things that you may not necessarily like, but can't stop from happening. The only thing you can do is accept them and learn to control them." Edith paused for a moment and then went on, "Do you think I sincerely wanted to welcome Timothy when he drove his army straight into the Northern Region? Every coin has two sides. The key lies in how you view it. Besides, I bet you like the garments you are wearing, otherwise you wouldn't have tried on my clothes. Am I right?"

Cole stiffened. Edith could always justify her behavior like it was a matter of course. He knew he wouldn't stand a chance if he tried to argue with his sister, so he kept silent.

But he would never admit to her last statement!

Then, he remembered Edith was impressed with the beauty of the tower. Was it because she viewed it from a different angle?

Cole thus voiced his doubt, and he clearly saw a rosy flush on Edith's cheeks.

"Do you still remember what the City of Evernight looks like in winter?" Edith asked.

"Um..." Cole thought for a while and soon remembered the warm fireplaces, the ales, and the banquets during the winter in the City of Evernight, all of which were associated with indoor activities. After a long silence, Cole answered hesitantly, "Maybe... kind of quiet?"

"It's dead silent, as if the earth was frozen." Edith looked at the distant high tower. "I always thought that was what winter should look like, but it's actually not true." Edith exhaled a breath which immediately misted in the air. "What are you seeing now? The

earth is breathing, and the steam proves that this city is alive."

"I don't really... get it."

"This shows that nature can be altered." The Pearl of the Northern Region stressed each word. "Human beings don't necessarily need to comply with the rules of nature. We have been constantly dominated by nature because we are weak. When we grow stronger, we can change the world. Isn't such power beautiful?"

But Cole saw something even more beautiful.

The lady who radiated confidence as she spoke. Her blue hair rippled in the flurries of snow, more breathtaking than anything else in the world. The rosy hue spreading across her cheeks softened the outline of her face, making her look even more stunning.

Cole had a sudden desire to see through his sister's eyes. He wanted to know what the world looked like to Edith Kant.

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"There's oil coming out!"

The crowd near Tower I began to cheer.

"What's going on?"

"Someone said it's oil!"

"Cooking oil?"

"Rubbish. Coal is processed here, not lard."

"Who cares what it is? Anything His Majesty does is brilliant."

"So can we celebrate now?"

"Yeah, long live the king!"

"Long live the king!"

Soon more and more people began cheering, even though many

of them had no idea what the fractionation tower was for, they understood that the king was happy.

The tidal wave of cheering spread throughout the smelting zone. Within a few minutes, the crowd became exuberant. The cheers of the people seemed to add a little color to the dull routine of everyday life in the depressing Months of Demons.

Watching wisps of black and white smoke rising along the river bank and the metallic tower rising up through the snow and mists, Roland felt his heart swell with pride.

If the thick smoke above the North Slope Mountain represented the success of the first industrial revolution, then the smoke produced by this tower heralded a brand new era.

Chapter 1005: A Letter from the Desert

"Achoo!"

When Lorgar got out of her warm bed, she felt a dull, throbbing pain on both sides of her head. She smacked her lips, still able to taste the remnant flavor of the strawberry liquor between her teeth.

"Looks like... I'm having a hangover again."

"Aw..."

An almost inaudible moan escaped her lips.

Lorgar had been like this ever since she had returned from the war.

She blamed the chief, Roland Wimbledon for all of her misery.

All the witches who had participated in the war were well rewarded for their services. Some had received dozens of dollars while some received over a hundred dollars. Lorgar had received a remuneration of 35 dollars, which equated to around 100 gold royals.

It was common to reward soldiers and warriors after a war. Mojin warriors were willing to bet their lives on a holy duel not only because of the fame and glory the fight would bring to them but also because of the huge rewards they would receive afterward. Since the desert was always short of resources, the competition for food was fierce. To live a better life, the Mojins had to constantly fight for it.

But the members of the Witch Union viewed their rewards in a completely different way.

Every night after the learning session was over, the castle hall would be filled with noise and laughter.

As the witches now had excessive money to squander, they spent

it lavishly on food and shared the food with the others. Andrea was particularly fond of organizing parties as she had received the greatest reward. In fact, she was the person who first started the tradition of carousing and revelry.

Lorgar had to admit that those pretty sheets of paper were magical. She didn't realize how much she had spent until she actually tallied up the numbers. It was seriously a huge amount.

But she just couldn't help it...

It was the first time the wolf girl had such an intimate relationship with her peers. After joining the Witch Union, she had soon been accepted by the other witches. Lorgar was quite flattered by their offers of friendship. Although witches were treated as Divine Ladies among the Mojin Clan and were highly respected by most clansmen, Divine Ladies rarely bonded among each other, because each of them represented different rival clans. They would keep a vigilant eye on each other when they met, and certainly would not dine or drink like friends.

Although none of the witches were tight on money, they could still not afford to have too many Chaos Drinks. Therefore, Andrea proposed a resolution through card games. The winner would have Chaos Drinks while the loser White Liquor. No magic was allowed, and those who participated in the game had to hold a God's Stone in their hand...

The end result—she ended up with a terrible hangover.

Lorgar would never admit the fault to be her own bad luck. So, she attributed everything to the chief.

Had Roland rewarded them with gold royals instead of paper bills, she would have saved up instead of spending them so recklessly.

"No, this has to stop."

The wolf girl patted her cheeks.

She kept reminding herself that the purpose of this trip was to polish her combat skills. If she continued to indulge herself in endless parties and games, she would forget all her fighting techniques.

Lorgar had never seen any of the God's Punishment Witches abandon themselves to worldly pleasure. They were always so dignified, solemn and self-possessed. That was what a seasoned warrior should look like!

Lorgar took a deep breath, pulled on a sweater and got off the bed. She planned to visit the Third Border City after brushing her teeth and washing her face.

Every single witch in the Third Border City was an excellent warrior. Since Lorgar was not allowed to leave the city alone, she thought it a good idea to learn some combat techniques from the God's Punishment Witches.

Just as Lorgar walked out of her bedroom, she noticed a piece of parchment wedged underneath the living room door.

After she had joined the Witch Union, she had moved to the Witch Building in the Castle District and shared a room with Sharon. However, most of the time she had the whole room to herself because Sharon only spent the nights in the building when necessary.

So she assumed this piece of parchment was for her.

Lorgar picked up the paper with curiosity and found it was a letter. She unsealed it and noticed it was her father's handwriting.

"My dear daughter, how are you doing in Neverwinter? I hope you aren't being bullied there."

Unlike the letters from the northern kingdom that always started with a long opening, her father's letter was simple and straightforward. The handwriting was as untidy as usual. Lorgar, however, felt a sense of belonging as she read the letter, as if she

was back in the desert again.

Her tail began to wag excitedly behind her.

Although Lorgar had been determined to not rely on her family anymore when she had departed her clan, she felt happy to know that somebody was still worried about her.

"How can I be bullied? I'm not a three year old!" Lorgar mumbled.

She continued to read the letter. "Haha, I think I asked the wrong question. You're Lorgar Burnflame, Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame Clan. Nobody can bully you, only you can bully others. Am I right?"

"Our clansmen have moved to the Port of Clearwater from Iron Sand City. We've got a piece of fertile land close to the river. Although I don't know how well the chief treats you, at least he has kept his word to us. He did what he promised during the holy duel. As long as we have a job, we can remain fed and clothed. Therefore, there have been more clans coming here, though it has also created some unpleasant disputes over resources."

"But those northerners are different from the Queen of Clearwater. They prohibit any brawls for personal reasons and insist on resorting to legal measures. The process is slow but at least we aren't being used. Many of the Sand Nation have agreed to resolve their problems in this way, so overall, life here is peaceful."

"Apart from rebuilding the Port of Clearwater, our clan has also developed many farmlands in the suburb. We're planning to grow the wheat shipped through the inner river. Many people from Fallen Dragon Ridge came here to teach us how to dig a trench, fertilize the land and grow crops. I have to admit it's so easy for the northerners to sustain themselves. They can easily grow the food we have to go through so much pain to collect from the oasis, and they grow so much surplus. Now, everyone has begun to live like a northerner. I'm not saying it isn't good, but I just feel something is

missing when we no longer need to hunt or train ourselves to be strong. My dear daughter, do you have any good idea to make up for this loss?"

"You should be asking my elder brother this question." Lorgar twitched her lips and continued to read.

"Now about you. If... I say, if the chief treats you well, you should find an opportunity to express your desire to serve him. I've heard northern nobles like a variety of girls. Perhaps he's that kind of person..."

The wolf girl rolled her eyes.

"Alright. Paws in. I'm just joking. Compared to that, I'm more concerned about your personal development. Have you encountered any of those horrible enemies? You should have become a lot stronger than when you left, right? Remember though, that you should always remain patient. Focus, and slowly work toward your goal."

Lorgar felt her cheeks flush red. She almost died of mortification.

Lorgar really had encountered the demons. There had even been a big war between them, to which she had contributed nothing. She had thought the front line would be the closest to the enemies, yet the demons had stopped somewhere 300 meters away from their encampment. As a result, instead of getting a closer look at her opponents, Lorgar had been attacked by a weird flying stone pillar and forced to retreat.

If she had known this would happen, she would have never chosen to stay at the front. The Artillery Battalion at the rear had, at least, got a chance to have a real battle.

In addition to this, she was also not accustomed to using the special firearms the chief specially made for her. They were powerful indeed but were, essentially, something external that could not help her improve herself. Meanwhile, she had a hard

time controlling the weapons, so it was difficult for her to blend them in with her actual combat skills.

The recent carousing further made Lorgar ashamed of her lack of self-discipline.

She had an impulse to visit the Third Border City right away, but stopped as she read the last paragraph of the letter.

The wolf girl frowned as she read.

"Right, I'm having a little problem. I've got news that Iron Sand City is a little disturbed these days. It appears the big clans living there aren't very happy about so many people leaving the Silver Stream Oasis, although I don't know the details. It's up to you to whether to report this to the chief. If he is discriminating against you because of your appearance, you should give him something to worry about as a way of retaliation, shouldn't you?"

Lorgar did not even need to think it over.

She put away the letter and pushed the door open. Just as she was about to set out for the castle, she spotted Wendy at the other end of the hallway.

Lorgar walked up to her and made a curt bow. "Could you take me to His Majesty? I have something to report to him."

"Such good timing," Wendy said, chuckling and winking. "His Majesty wants to see you too. Follow me."

Chapter 1006: A "Magic Movie"

To Lorgar's surprise, the chief did not receive her in his study.

Lorgar followed Wendy into the castle parlor and noticed that other than Roland Wimbledon, there was also another woman she did not know in the room.

She surveyed the woman with curiosity and noticed the latter was also studying her attentively. Lorgar did not like the way in which the woman stared at her. It was such a piercing stare that she had an impression the woman could see through all of her thoughts.

"There you are," Roland said, as laid back as he always was. "I need you to complete a new task. Please take a seat."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Lorgar replied. After living in Neverwinter for half a year, Lorgar learned that the chief did not take the etiquettes very seriously. She went straight up to the lady and sat down in front of her, tail high in the air. Then she said, "However, I want to tell you something about the Southernmost Region first."

"Oh, that sounds interesting," said Roland as he raised his brows. "Go ahead."

Lorgar related the news she had learned from her father and said, "I don't think the clans in Iron Sand City would pose any threats to Port of Clearwater, but it would be a good idea to keep our eyes peeled. It takes time and effort to develop a virgin land but only a second to destroy it. We need to stay alert, especially considering that the main force of the First Army isn't stationed there anymore. They are all back to Neverwinter."

"I see," said Roland thoughtfully as he stroked his chin. "In fact, the General Staff has foreseen this kind of situation when they proposed to relocate the clansmen. It has been almost a year now. I believe they're well prepared."

Lorgar asked thoughtfully, "You are referring to..."

"That's right," Roland said, flashing back a smile. "As the First Army has to get prepared for the Battle of Divine Will, we can't rely on them to take care of everything in the kingdom. It'd be better to let the locals solve the problem in the Southernmost Region themselves." Roland paused for a few seconds and then said, "But I appreciate your father's heads-up. If he could interfere with the matter, that would be very helpful."

"Perhaps I can write to my father." The wolf girl blurted out. She soon realized she had already taken the side of Neverwinter... or rather, the chief's side before she even noticed it.

"It's politics. Leave it to me." Roland waved away Lorgar's request. "Plus, I asked you to come here not to discuss those serious political matters. Let me present May to you. You are probably more familiar with her other name: the Star of the Western Region."

"Star Flower... Troupe?" Lorgar was a bit surprised. She took little interest in plays. In fact, she had not known the name of the troupe until Echo had told her. Lorgar knew nothing about the troupe except that there were two famous actresses admired by everyone in Neverwinter.

She wondered what she had to do with the troupe.

"You're Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame Clan, right? Growing up in the desert, you look indeed quite different from us." May finally stopped gazing at Lorgar. She rose to her feet and dipped in a curtsy gracefully. "Nice to meet you, Ms. Lorgar. I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Working with me?" Lorgar was completely in a blank. She gave the chief a bewildered look. May was not a witch. As for herself, she did not have a talent in acting like Echo. It did not make any sense for her to work with May.

"Let me explain it to you," Roland said, a faint smile playing about his lips. "Do you remember I once said that more people should accept those witches who possess abilities similar to yours? People shouldn't judge a person by their looks. No matter how strange their appearances are, they are one of us, even if they have scaly faces. Starring in a play is definitely the fastest way to let people know about you."

"You want me to be on stage?" said Lorgar, panic-stricken. Although the residents in Neverwinter weren't blatantly discriminating her because of her ears and tail, it was a different story to put herself in the spotlight. Lorgar protested, "But I know nothing about acting, and this isn't something I'm good at either. I haven't seen anyone show hostility against me. Perhaps you should find someone else..."

"Don't worry." As if seeing through her mind, Roland replied, "You don't need to act in front of strangers, and the target audience isn't Neverwinter residents either. This is something brand new. I call it mo — No, it should be termed as 'magic movie'."

"Magic movie?" The wolf girl echoed.

Roland presented her a strange-looking crystal on his desk, and then she noticed it was not just a piece of ordinary ornament. There were three gorgeous gems embedded in the silver-white prism, patterned in ghostly blue stripes. As the light hit the prism from different angles, Lorgar saw flickers of light reflect off the surface of the striped prism.

"This is called the Sigil of Recording. Like the Sigil of God's Will, it's a legacy device used in the Taquila Age. It can create various magic effects if used in combination with other magic stones," Roland explained. "However, it doesn't mean that the Sigil can manipulate time. Instead, it records it. Thanks to the Senior Demon and the giant Devilbeast we captured, we obtained many high-quality magic stones, including this one. It's very precious, so it isn't easy to get hold of one. In other words, you aren't acting on

the central square or anywhere else, but in this very world."

"When I heard we can do such a wonderful thing with magic power, I couldn't contain my surprise and excitement," May put in. "Ms. Lorgar doesn't know much about plays, so you may not understand what this implies. Our performances depend on various factors, such as the actress' age, her experience and personal condition. Therefore, we can't expect her each show to be perfect. She can only have her best performance once."

"However, His Majesty is now able to record our best moments, which means we can rehearse our every single movement and expression until they are perfect. This is a miracle!"

"I've heard the Sigil was used to record important meetings and ceremonies. It's an ingenious idea to experiment with it on plays. His Majesty decided to write a play based on a real story." May heaped praises on Roland. "I'm certain once the news gets out, all actors will be exhilarated. They will be willing to pay tons of gold royals to witness this historic moment."

"Ahem." Roland was a little embarrassed, an expression that was rarely seen on him. "Star Flower Troupe should take the full credit. You've done a lot over the past two years in terms of political propaganda." He then turned to Lorgar and asked, "What do you think of it? The story is based solely on your personal experience. It took me nearly half a month to write it."

Lorgar did not have the faintest idea what the "magic movie" was. She could neither relate acting to the miraculous magic stone, nor did she want to waste her precious time on something she had no interest in. However, when Roland told her that the story was based on her personal experience, she changed her mind.

"Well in that case... I'll give it a shot," Lorgar replied while shaking her ears.

Chapter 1007: The Sigil of Recording

After everyone withdrew from the room, Nightingale asked, "Half a month? Didn't you just make the decision a couple of days ago?"

"Nevermind the details," said Roland whilst ignoring Nightingale's question. "Do you think she would agree if I told her the truth? If Lorgar refused to participate in this project, we would have to ask Joan. She can't even talk to people, except Lightning and Maggie. Even if May teaches her acting skills, it wouldn't be much of a help. That's why I spoke in such a grave tone so that Lorgar couldn't refuse... This is also one of my negotiation techniques."

"Well, I suppose you're right..." Nightingale muttered under her breath while twitching her lips. "But why do I have the impression that this wasn't the real reason she consented."

"What did you say?" said Roland.

"No, nothing," Nightingale said evasively with a whistle. She shoved a piece of dried fish into her mouth and asked, "Is it really OK to leave the Southernmost Region as it is?"

Roland shrugged to indicate that he had no intention of probing into the matter. "It might be bad news if this happened in the time before their relocation where nobody knew what life in Port of Clearwater would be like. But now, it's too late for the conservatives to turn the table. The fact that the chief of the Wildflame clan wrote to Lorgar about this incident indicates that he has completely sided with us. Those conservatives can't win. If they do wage a war, they would be declaring enmity towards all the clans."

There was a garrison of 500 new recruits stationed at Fallen Dragon Ridge and Port of Clearwater, but Roland was not planning to send them to the desert. He simply needed to inform Brian in

the Southern Territory for the latter to know what to do.

Roland was now done with negotiation and persuasion. If someone attempted to stir up trouble, he did not mind resorting to force.

Nevertheless, Roland did not want to waste his time on these trifling matters. He returned his attention back to the Sigil of Recording.

The Months of Demons had been ongoing for half a month already. In the past, by this time of the year, the focus of Neverwinter would normally shift from construction to city defense. People would automatically start to prepare themselves to fight against demonic beasts without the need of Roland to remind them.

But the whole northwest was surprisingly peaceful this year. No demonic hybrid groups had emerged so far, not even the regular demonic beasts that usually acted alone.

Lightning had once flown to Hermes Plateau. She reported that no demonic beasts were found there either. She had also seen the flag of the Wimbledon House ripple upon the city wall of the new holy city. Within, she saw nuns delivering bricks back and forth to build new blockhouses and to form a defensive line at the garrison in Coldwind Ridge. Nothing else came into her view except a desolate land covered by snow as though the entire Fertile Plains was frozen.

After a heated discussion, the ancient witches concluded that the demons had stopped the invasion of demonic beasts.

It made sense. Although the Taquila Ruins was a tiny spot on the vast plains, the demons relied on it to transport supplies and put out sentries. It was very likely that they had exterminated those demonic beasts long ago.

As all the construction work had been suspended due to the

interminable snow and there was no need to fight at the border any longer, the residents in Neverwinter soon found themselves in a state of extreme boredom. Roland was well aware how detrimental this could be to people's morale, especially when this occurred after a major victory. The best example was the witches in the castle who abandoned themselves to card games and carouse. To keep people motivated and also to help the witches release their energy, Roland had thus decided to make a movie.

Roland had witnessed the effect of the Sigil of Recording once at Reflection Church in the old holy city. It was even more impressive than the 3D photography in modern society. The recording was, in a sense, a reconstruction of a scene. Roland believed that before he could successfully develop virtual reality technologies, the Sigil would be irreplaceable in the entertainment industry.

Roland wondered how citizens would react to the lifelike 3D movie when a mere traditional play was sufficient to entertain them.

Now, Roland saw why May had lost her composure after seeing what the Sigil could do. For actresses like her, the technology was definitely epochal. If she could star in the movie, she would be remembered by all her peers in the acting industry.

He didn't tell May, however, that in reality, movies soon replaced plays, becoming the most popular form of entertainment in modern society. It was a truth May would probably never expect to happen.

Despite its amazing recording feature, the Sigil of Recording had a big drawback, which was that the recording wasn't modifiable. Moreover, the magic stone of which the sigil was made of was only available to the demons. According to Agatha, one Sigil of Recording had a "battery life" of 12 hours. Once it was fully "charged", it would start to record the scene. The recording would automatically stop upon interruption, which meant no mistakes were allowed during the process. The only way to eliminate a

recording error was to recharge the stone for another 12 hours and start again from the beginning. In that case, the new recording would overwrite the old images.

Another downside was that the Sigil could not be recycled.

Like the Sigil of Listening, the Sigil of Recording was also a compound. The Sigil of Listening was composed of two separate parts, a "receiver" and a "microphone". The Sigil of Recording, however, was exactly the opposite. It worked only when two stones were combined. There was a groove at the top of its crystal base. When the magic stone was injected with magic blood and inserted into the groove, the Sigil would instantly start to play all the footages it had previously saved. You could not switch back to the recording mode once the Sigil started to play footages. Removing the magic stone by force would destroy the device. This was actually an asset for preserving important historical records — once the Sigil was in the play mode, nobody could tamper with the videotape.

This made it a big downside for filming.

Because in that case, they only had one chance to shoot, and all shots had to be perfect without any errors, which was almost impossible to achieve.

Fortunately, Roland had found a solution.

He just needed to ask Summer to reconstruct scenes.

In this way, actresses could rehearse as many times as they liked until they were satisfied with their performances. During the final shot, a "cameraman" would arrive and film with the Sigil of Recording. Since Summer could fast forward, playback and pause footages, they could even achieve some special effects such as bullet time.

Summer's ability did not include reconstructing sounds, but Echo's dubbing could easily solve this problem.

Now that all the conditions for filming were met, Roland just needed actors and actresses. He could foresee what a big stir the movie would make among the public.

...

After taking a shower, Lorgar wrapped herself in a bath towel and returned to her room.

She slumped onto her soft bed before her tail was completely dry.

Her body was sore from training, but she felt happy for being productive again. She did not care about how much progress she had made at this point.

All she needed now was a good rest.

Then she saw the yellow book on the nightstand in the corner of her eyes.

"Ah... right, the script."

Lorgar pricked up her ears, untied the bath towel, got into bed and picked the script up.

May Lannis had told her it was important to familiarize herself with the story first. If she had any questions, she was welcome to ask her anytime.

But this was not what Lorgar cared about.

She just wanted to know what the chief thought of her.

Since it was a story created for her, she might find some clues in it.

Lorgar took a deep breath and started to read.

Then she saw the title —

"The Wolf Princess"

Chapter 1008: The Wolf Princess

"Once upon a time, there was a great city with lofty mountains behind and a beautiful plain in front. It was known as the Mountain City and inside of it lived two lovely little princesses."

"At the age of 14, the elder princess awakened and became a witch. It was not a big deal since the people of the city lived with the witches in peace. Actually, without the witches' help, they could never settle down in this dangerous place. But beyond everyone's expectations, the magic power ruined the princess' appearance instead of increasing her beauty."

"Her ears atrophied day by day while a pair of furry pointy ears were growing on the top of her head. Her fingers became long and hairy and it was hard to shave them. Gradually, she started to look different from a human being."

"No one has ever seen such a witch. Even the court mentors could not confirm that this change was caused by awakening."

"As time went by, the princess' condition got worse and worse. A rumor from an unknown source started to go around the palace. They whispered that the elder princess was cursed."

"So the great chief wants me to play this elder princess?" Lorgar touched her own face and thought. "Lucky for me... I don't have hairy cheeks."

She felt sympathetic to the elder princess. Lorgar got her half-animal look after repeated use of her transformation ability and had spent quite a long time to accept this change. The princess in the story, however, began to look like a wolf after her awakening and it was not strange that she would be rejected or abhorred by others.

"This is too cruel to the princess. Maybe the great chief should make some change here."

The Wolf Girl maneuvered her body into a more comfortable position and turned to the next page with interest.

"The princess' little sister did not mind her changes at all, but the wolf princess could clearly feel the increase of the strength in her body. It was so strong that she was afraid that she would not be able to control it well. Since she did not want to hurt her little sister accidentally someday, she deliberately distanced herself from her, and in the end, she even shut herself off in the depths of the palace."

"Since then, the two princesses who had been so close had lost touch with one another."

"This separation lasted for four years."

"When the little princess was 16 years old, something unforeseen took place."

"An exotic prince came to the Mountain City to propose to the little princess. His convoys formed a long queue of 2,500 meters, and his attendants respectfully called him king of the world. The jewelry he wore shone brighter than the sun, and all the girls in the city were attracted by his handsome appearance."

"The king was greatly pleased and held a splendid banquet to entertain this distinguished guest."

"All the nobles praised the prince and averred that the marriage between him and the little princess would bring supreme wealth and prosperity to the Mountain City."

"I disagree!"

"The wolf princess suddenly came to the banquet hall."

"She couldn't sit idly by and let a suspicious person take her little sister away."

"However, her little sister, who had not seen the wolf princess for four years, hesitated to trust her judgment."

"Overwhelmed by sadness and disappointment, the wolf princess finally lost control of her power. She vandalized the hall and injured the prince. After that, she escaped from the Mountain City."

"Ah... you idiot, your ability won't grow with your age." Lorgar stroked her forehead. She speculated that such uncontrollable behaviors must have been caused by lack of practice. She thought that if she was the wolf princess in the story, she would ask her father to build her an exercise room where she could fight against some professional warriors every day to improve her skills. Only by doing so, a witch would learn to manipulate her magic power flexibly.

Lorgar herself could serve as an example. In the second year after her awakening, she had succeeded in using her wolf hand to hold a cup without crushing it after repeated practice.

She had just intended to flip through the pages in the beginning, but now, she was utterly immersed in the story and could not wait to know what was going to happen next.

"The wolf princess decided to let go of her past and freely release her energy after she left the city. Soon her Day of Adulthood arrived. Her power increased drastically and she turned into a giant wolf. Meanwhile, she realized something strange about the exotic prince. He had come to the city on a snowy day, but his convoys had left no track in the snow and there had been no light in the carriages even at night. It seemed as if the ones inside the carriages were not human beings."

"At the same time, inside the city, the little princess felt that she was wrong. She did not want to lose her elder sister, her closest friend in the world. With the help of a pigeon and a fish, she sneaked out of the palace and set out to find the wolf princess."

"Unexpectedly, she bumped into the exotic prince halfway. He came to stop her but she refused to leave with him. At this

moment, the prince tore off his disguise and revealed his true self. He turned out to be an insidious demon lord. It proudly explained the whole thing to the princess: The Mountain City was a natural choke point, so the demon lord planned to crack human beings' defense line from the inside, and after its army conquered the Mountain City, they would march into the heavily populated areas. It told the princess that it was already too late for human beings to react since their army, which was hiding in the convoys was slowly passing through the gate of the city now."

"After that, the demon lord kidnapped the princess, but the pigeon overheard the whole conversation and told it to the wolf princess. Without any hesitation, she rushed back into the city which was now caught in the maelstrom of war. She helped the soldiers to turn the situation around and led the human army to recapture the palace."

"However, the demon lord still refused to give up, so a decisive battle between the demon and the wolf princess broke out."

"After a fierce combat, the wolf princess killed the demon lord and saved her sister and the city. Unfortunately, she was severely wounded during the battle and died in the end. When her sister became the queen, she built a statue in the city to commemorate the wolf princess. This touching story was widely spread and passed down from generation to generation..."

Lorgar closed the book and rubbed her sore neck.

She breathed a big sigh of relief and felt sincerely satisfied!

She could tell from the story that in the great chief's view, she was an excellent warrior now, who could not only protect her friends but also stand out to save a country. She felt so flattered and wagged her tail happily.

She did not have a problem with the ending where the wolf princess died. As a warrior, she thought it was an honor to be killed on the battlefield, especially in a fight against a strong

opponent. For her, it was an acceptable ending, since there was not a healing witch like Miss Nana in the story.

However, she still felt confused about some parts of the story.

Such as, why did the wolf princess feel so bad when she heard that her younger sister was about to get married. Since at that time, the exotic princess was so popular and no one found out that he was a demon, as an elder sister, the wolf princess should have wished the new couple all the best.

She also wondered why the demon lord had to explain everything to the little princess before kidnapping her. As a military leader, it appeared too talkative and was clearly not prudent enough.

"Well... who cares."

"Now that I had already promised the great chief, I have to act in this drama—no, this magic movie well. As for the training... it is not too late to start it half a month later."

Lorgar stretched herself in satisfaction and fell asleep with a smile on her face.

Chapter 1009: Commitment

Three days later, the filming for The Wolf Princess officially began.

Undoubtedly, shooting a film was a brand new experience for the people in this world, but Roland had never expected them to become this crazy over it.

Since the very first day, it had caught the attention of all the Witch Union members.

Most of them had never seen a film, but this did not prevent them from imagining how marvelous it would be. Some of the cast were God's Punishment witches. They vividly described their experiences in the cinemas of the Dream World and so made this magic movie sound even more appealing.

If someone now asked the witches which location they wanted to visit the most, most of them would definitely choose the Dream World.

The Witch Union members and the Sleeping Island witches, who were unable to get into the Dream World, were particularly looking forward to this movie.

No one was willing to just spend their whole day eating, drinking or playing cards anymore. By the second day of filming, all of them, even Tilly, had applied to join the film shooting project.

Roland was surprised since, as far as he could remember, this was the first time Tilly had ever demanded something from him.

In the end, the roster of the cast and the crew members had to be changed several times to include the extra witches. Roland was more than happy to indulge them as long as it did not affect their work and productivity. These new members also brought the crew many surprises.

Lightning was one such example. She replaced Amy to work as

the cameraman.

In order to portray the two princesses' happy childhood in a better light, the little girl took full advantage of her flying ability. She flew up into the sky and then descended from that height to shoot a panorama of the snowy city. She recorded a stream of pedestrians while flying along the streets. After that, she captured all the images along the way as she flew into a small bedroom in the castle through a window which had many icicles on the frame. Finally, she landed in the room to shoot a close-up of the laughing sisters in front of a burning fireplace.

Roland spent a great deal of time explaining camera language to the crew. He even drew pictures to show them what he meant, even though he was not good at sketching at all.

In the middle of describing basic viewing angles and framing of shots to the crew, he spotted an exceptionally excited look in May's eyes.

The Star of the Western Region was extremely talented in drama. She could imagine a whole scene in her head and could take each prop and each person in that scene into consideration. It was not an obvious advantage for a traditional theater actress, but it would become an incredibly important skill in filmmaking.

The other actress Irene, who was playing the younger sister of the wolf princess, was sorely lacking such a talent.

In the following days, May started to use the shooting skills she had learned from Roland.

She quickly got familiar with them and even created some new techniques on her own.

Some of the scenes that she directed even reminded Roland of the modern movies.

When she filmed the scene where the exotic prince came to the palace, she began with close-ups of his jewel-encrusted boots, his

golden cloak, silk shirt, and then his handsome smiling face. After that, she panned out to show a long queue of gorgeously dressed servants behind him to show his grand entrance. By the way, the man who played the prince was her husband, Carter Lannis. Though Roland was reluctant to admit it, his Chief Knight was indeed the most handsome man in Neverwinter when dressed up.

The improvement in composition and directing was just one of the surprises.

The adoption of special effects was an even more amazing progress.

New ideas and new visual effects emerged every day.

Soraya's "three-dimensional background" was one such example.

Another was Sharon's lightning effect.

If needed, Nightingale could use her Mist, Molly her Magic Servant, and Shadow could create phantom illusions for even more special effects.

Maggie played two roles in the movie. In her pigeon form, she was a close friend of the younger princess. In her Devilbeast form, she was the demon lord's best warrior and would fight a fierce battle against the wolf princess on a snowy field. The battle scenes they filmed could only be called "ground-breaking". Both the earth and the mountains would tremble and all the birds and animals would flee from the scene as fast as they could.

Even Lotus and Honey got to contribute significantly to the production of the movie.

By the time they were just halfway through the filming of the movie, the number of crew members had already expanded to more than 300 people. Apart from the Witch Union members, the Sleeping Spell witches and the Taquila survivors were also attracted by this event. In the end, this filmmaking process turned into a giant carnival for the witches.

Standing on top of the city wall, Roland looked down at the bustling crowd and sighed with emotion.

To his surprise, this magic movie brought the three witch organizations closer. In the past, they had been like oil and water, refusing to mix, but now they seemed to be able to along well with each other, as if they were one big family.

No matter what kind of abilities they had, now they worked together for the same movie. When they focused on doing their jobs well, they forgot about their differences in strength and origin. Gradually, this experience created a very special bond between them.

For Roland, this was really a pleasant surprise.

It was a cold day. As Roland exhaled, he could see white vapor coming out of his mouth. He turned to look at Anna. "Aren't you going down to have some fun with them?"

In the beginning, Nightingale joined the film crew only when she was needed. However, now she frolicked around with them all day long.

"No, I've lots of work to do." Anna showed her hands to Roland. Her sleeves were covered in oil. "The sizes of the internal combustion engine parts in the drawing aren't accurate enough. I still have to make adjustments, and..."

"Huh?" Roland blinked.

"And I have the most fun staying beside you." She smiled and rested her head on his shoulder.

The next moment, he felt her warm flames spread out to dispel the chill of the snow.

He shut his mouth and enjoyed this peaceful moment with her.

After a long time, Anna said in a soft voice, "The future you promised has arrived."

He followed her gaze to look at the crew again. Besides the witches, the common people also fitted in well. May was making gestures with her hands. She seemed to be teaching Lorgar and Carter how to act together. Irene was squatting by the side combing Maggie's hair. The little girl was squinting her eyes and seemed to really be enjoying it. Together with the God's Punishment Witches, the new staff of the film crew was placing the props for the next scene. Compared to a factory, which featured a clear division of labor, the film crew's style of working appeared more relaxed and harmonious.

On this snowy day, both the witches and the common people were working together with one heart and one mind.

"No, I have yet to fulfill all of my promises." Roland shook his head.

"Are you referring to the situation of the other regions of Graycastle? Things are going to get better in those cities soon."

"No, I didn't mean the relations between the witches and the common people. I meant something else," he replied with a smile. "I thought that I would need mountains of preparations to achieve this goal step by step, but now I feel that it's not that complicated. As long as I take the first few steps, the rest of the problems will automatically resolve themselves in the process, just like how this movie has progressed. I haven't set up any rules or guidelines for it, but it has still turned out this well. It's even given me a lot of pleasant surprises."

"So what is it that you still have left to fulfill?" Anna raised her head and blinked. In her eyes that were as blue as a peaceful lake, he saw the reflection of snowflakes.

"Ascend the throne as a king," Roland paused and then said word by word, "and then marry you."

Chapter 1010: A Legitimate Heir

"Your Majesty... Your Majesty, please think twice!" Roland heard Barov shouting anxiously outside his office.

It was only after the City Hall Director had run to his desk while panting heavily that Roland finally put down his teacup and asked, "What should I think twice about? The coronation ceremony?"

"No. I meant your wedding announcement. You are going to marry a witch and make her your queen." Barov glanced toward the place behind Roland while wiping the sweat from his forehead. "Ah, Your Majesty, I'm afraid this isn't a proper way to handle the case."

Roland was not surprised by Barov's objection at all. He had anticipated as much when he first informed the City Hall of his decision. To remove the obstacles to his marriage to Anna, the City Hall would be the first group that he had to persuade.

After the Months of Demons, Neverwinter would send troops to the Fertile Plains once again to eliminate the demons' latest outpost in Taquila. Meanwhile, the City Hall would be busy carrying out the spring plowing plans, new construction projects, and trade programs. The coming year would be an exceptionally busy year for Graycastle, so it did not sound like a good idea to hold such a ceremony now. According to tradition, preparing a coronation alone would need at least two to three months, not to mention that there was a wedding after it. Preparing these activities would inevitably increase his administration's workload and thus would interfere with Neverwinter's production and military plans. However, Roland did not make this decision on a sudden impulse.

Different from the previous winters, this winter was peaceful. He wanted to seize this rare opportunity to hold both his coronation ceremony and his wedding, which would boost his subjects' morale

without costing him too much effort.

More importantly, he really hoped to redeem his promise to Anna as soon as possible.

Of course, as a feudal king, he could do whatever he wished just like the rest of the self-indulgent rulers throughout history who had imposed their personal values on others and thus had forced their foolish decisions to get implemented. However, he did not intend to become such a ruler. He created this City Hall, and he was confident that he could properly handle this case without turning against his own administration.

In Roland's view, exercising his power while staying within the boundaries of the rules would be a much better choice than abusing his power.

"Why?" Roland knocked on the desk as he asked Barov.

"It's... it's because you need an heir," Barov said urgently. "Everyone knows that a witch can never give you a child. There's a war on the horizon. If some unexpected stroke of misfortune were to happen to you, the other nobles would covet your throne. An heir will make your people feel secure." Barov paused for a moment before adding, "If you just want to be with lady Anna, you don't really need to marry her."

"Oh? What do you mean?"

"You could marry a lesser noble's daughter," Barov suggested. "No one would oppose such a decision. You don't have to take her seriously. You just need her to stand beside you on official occasions, and you can still do whatever you want—"

"So you mean that Anna can't become the queen because she's a witch?" Nightingale suddenly interrupted.

"I don't think Lady Anna will mind such superficial things." Barov coughed twice to cover his embarrassment. "It's for the benefit of the country, Your Majesty. If you find it hard to tell Lady

Anna about this arrangement in person, I can pass on your words to her."

"You aren't her. How can you know that she won't mind? I can bet that she would never want a third person between His Majesty and herself!" Nightingale insisted.

"It has nothing to do with personal feelings. It's about an heir..."

"Enough." Roland raised his hands to stop them. "I get it. I just need to find a legitimate heir to the throne to reassure my people."

"Find... a legitimate heir?" Barov was a little bit startled.

"Isn't this a good solution?" Roland replied with a casual air. "After I defeated the Pope, I absorbed her entire lifespan. I actually don't need anyone to inherit the throne. That's why I was able to decide to marry Anna. Unfortunately, there are only a few people like you who know about this matter. Most of the subjects know little about magic power and thus probably won't believe it. Under such circumstances, in order to give my people an inner sense of security, I must find an heir and let them pin their hopes on him. Am I right?"

Since the battle at Coldwind Ridge against the church, the senior officials of the City Hall were aware that Roland had gone through a spiritual battle called the Battle of Souls, in which the winner could inherit everything from the loser. They had found it hard to believe at first, but then the appearance of the Taquila witches and their Soul Transfer technique had reduced their doubts about it. During the first United Front meeting, Roland had confirmed this rumor and had used this advantage to win Pasha's trust. Ever since then, all the senior officials of the City Hall had bought the story that Roland now had a limitless lifespan.

"Yes, that's what I meant," Barov said, unaware that he was falling into a trap. "As long as you have an heir, no one will oppose your marriage."

"I have a simpler way to solve this problem." Roland shrugged. "A year ago, when we attacked Hermes, I happened to find Gerald Wimbledon's mistress. She's a maid working in a tavern, and she had a son with Gerald."

"What did you... say?" Barov's eyes widened in surprise. "Are you sure that the child is..."

"Yes, he has grey hair and grey eyes." Roland nodded.

"Why didn't you tell me at that time?"

"If I had told you, they would have been killed a long time ago." Roland picked up his teacup and took a sip. "How is it? We have a legitimate heir now. Isn't it a better way to solve the problem?"

Gerald's child was indeed a good choice. He was not a threat to Roland and could be replaced at any time. Even though he might ultimately never become the king, he would still be widely discussed and could greatly raise the subjects' spirits. Barov's eyes shone with excitement. Seeing this, Roland knew that the Chief Director had already understood what he meant. Now, he did not need to do anything except tell the subjects about this boy and bring him to Neverwinter.

As for the actual situation surrounding the little boy and his mother, he believed that the people would exert their imagination and creativity to make up their own legendary stories.

"If his mother is just a maid in a tavern, he can only be counted as a bastard child. We must give his mother a higher status. Otherwise, making him an heir will attract many disapproving comments. Fortunately, she's not a noble lady. It's much easier to control a civilian woman..." Barov started to plan the whole thing in his heart.

Roland felt his lips curling into a smile. Now he could avoid fighting a verbal battle against Barov to sell his ideas, unlike three years ago. The City Hall Director could easily follow his hints and

help him plan out the whole thing. No one would doubt his words anymore, no matter how implausible they sounded, not even his claim of having eternal life.

"You go make a plan for this child and my coronation ceremony. We'll discuss the details later." Roland waved his hand to Barov, indicating that he was dismissed.

After Barov's departure, Roland heaved a long sigh of relief. "I never expected that you would speak up for Anna."

"I'm sorry. I just can't help it..."

"No, you don't need to apologize. You're absolutely right." He glanced at Nightingale deliberately and found that she looked much calmer than he had expected. "I just thought you would..."

"You thought I would look miserable and feel depressed hearing this news?" Nightingale gave him a cold stare. "I think this wedding is already too late. If it wasn't for Anna, I wouldn't have let you get away with it so easily."

Roland still remembered the relieved look on her face when she had appeared in front of him after disappearing for two days. He guessed that her change must have had something to do with the secret agreement between her and Anna.

Curious as he was, he still did not ask her about the secret.

Chapter 1011: Making a Big Splash

Now that the new administrative system had significantly sped up information transmission, the news about the king's coronation and wedding quickly spread from west to north, causing a stir along its way.

In the past, this kind of news was usually spread by merchants and boatmen. Now, however, the local government of each town and city posted bulletins in the busiest streets and sent staff to explain them to the public. It seemed as if the government wanted every person to know the king's decision. Under such circumstances, the news became the hottest topic in all towns and cities within just a few days. Everybody was so fervently talking about it that they had even forgotten about the cold weather.

As always, most civilians loved to gather around a fireplace to drink ale and discuss the recent news and hearsay. This traditional recreational pastime for the people brought brisk business as well as various views and information to taverns. Covert Trumpeter was such a place.

Black Hammer, the new owner of the tavern, grinned from ear to ear in these days. His business usually languished in winters, but this winter, his tavern was flourishing because of the news about the king's coronation and wedding. Seeing the rapid increase in his income, he felt really good.

He predicted that his business would continue to boom until the end of the king's coronation ceremony.

"What a wise decision to hold the ceremony in the Months of Demons!" he thought as his heart melted in gratitude. If he could meet His Majesty in person now, he would immediately get on the ground to kiss his boots.

After all, gold royals were the most adorable thing in the whole world.

Unfortunately, as a former Rat, he probably would not be allowed to meet Roland Wimbledon. He even seldom got a chance to meet Theo.

Black Hammer knew his limits and never expected a sudden status upgrade.

Theo was not a poor patrol leader or an ordinary guard of Prince Roland anymore. Since Timothy's defeat, he had become the most powerful man in the old king's city. He had easily sent the previous owner of Covert Trumpeter, Nagy, who had treated Rats like cr*p, to some remote place. In the clean-up operation against Black Street, Black Hammer and his friends had followed Theo's advice to split off from Skeleton Fingers. That was how they became official subjects of the city and took over this tavern.

Black Hammer could never forget about Theo's help.

He wanted to express his gratitude to him personally, so he planned to visit Theo's home with Silver Ring, Pott and Little Finger before he left the old king's city. Though this might cost him some gold royals, he believed that as long as he could keep a good relationship with Theo, he would earn them back sooner or later.

Despite that, he also knew that he should do his job properly.

He needed to collect information for Theo. Once he heard some valuable information from some bragging trader or traveler, he would write it down and send it to the connector.

At present, he was on watch for potential insurgents.

There were some suspicious-looking people on the 6th table.

"Do you really believe that's just a coincidence?" A red-faced merchant grumbled. "How come the king hastily arranged his coronation ceremony all of a sudden? Do you really believe he just happened to find his eldest brother's widow and son when he announced that he was going to marry a witch who can never bear

a child?"

This statement was echoed by some people. "I've heard that His Highness Gerald didn't like women at all. Someone stated that he had an affair with a young knight. How come he suddenly had a fiancee?"

"Really?"

"You aren't from here. Of course, you don't know anything. Unlike Prince Timothy and Prince Roland, he seldom attended banquets, so it's probably true."

"And think about it," the merchant spoke again. "His Majesty only said that he was going to bring them to Neverwinter. He didn't confirm that the child was Gerald's son. He did this on purpose. He wants us to discuss whether the boy is a lawful inheritor of the throne. When we focus on talking about where the boy's mother came from and whether he's an offspring of the Wimbledon family, either of which will take us at least several years. By then, we would've forgotten about the most important thing."

"What... exactly are you trying to say?"

"What's the most important thing?"

"The witches!" He took a swig of wine and continued. "They must have manipulated the king and created the so-called widow and child to distract our attention. They're scheming to control the whole Graycastle!"

Everyone was in an uproar. "Witches can make people?"

"Yes, they're capable of making anything!" The merchant exclaimed bitterly. "They could make stones float on water, not to mention creating a person. Because of these evil stone things, no one comes to hire my ship anymore! Though, they may not be able to make a flawless person. That's why they made up this story. They need more time. When they succeed, they won't need the

child anymore!"

"Aha, you must be out of your mind. Do you think that His Majesty stays alone in the palace with only one God's Stone of Retaliation?" The crowd erupted into laughter, bringing cheer to the tavern.

"You guys—hic—keep laughing. The witches have already produced some machine to replace the miners in Silver City and have filled all the inland rivers with their concrete ships. Soon it'll be your turn, and then we'll see who's laughing!" The merchant rumbled.

Well, it's not valuable information, but this guy sounds quite rebellious. With this thought in mind, Black Hammer took out his charcoal and a piece of paper to write down the features of the merchant. He also commented in this report that this man slandered the royal family and maliciously attacked the witches. After that, he folded the paper and inserted it into an inconspicuous slit in the wine cabinet.

If nothing else, the police department would quickly respond to his report. He estimated that the merchant would get caught the moment he stepped out of the tavern. As for whether he was a rebel, he believed the interrogator would find out the answer. That was not his task.

...

At this moment, Yorko was selecting clothes inside his residence in the Inner City.

"How about this one?" He asked as he lifted a formal high-collared garment made of fine material in front of himself. "Will it make me look fat?"

The person he was asking was Denise Payton, the businesswoman he had met at the Kingdom of Dawn's king's city. She was rolling on the bed and covered her bare chest with just a corner of the

quilt. "You never prepared so carefully when you were dating me. You haven't received an invitation yet. Do you intend to go to Neverwinter right after you heard the news?"

"I'm an old friend of His Majesty. Invitations are for outsiders. I don't need it," said Yorko as he shook the garment. "You haven't answered me. What about this garment?"

"To be honest, you look almost the same no matter what you wear," said Denise as she yawned. "I wasn't attracted by your appearance after all. By the way, when you leave for Neverwinter, what should I do?"

"Ugh," he hesitated. "If you want to have some fun, I can introduce you to some good..."

"Not interested." Denise interrupted him right away. "I prefer choosing targets by myself. Besides, is that how you treat a guest who came to you all the way from the City of Glow?"

Yorko felt a little guilty. He sighed and asked, "So, what do you want?"

The businesswoman smiled and replied, "Take me to Neverwinter. I've long wished to meet the king who turned the Kingdom of Dawn upside down."

"This..."

"Since you're his old friend, the king will certainly invite you to attend his dinner party, right?" Denise asked as she threw the quilt back and got out of the bed. She stepped to Yorko and continued, "You only need to bring me there as your plus one. I've brought you to lots of banquets back in the City of Glow. You'll grant me this small request, won't you?" She put her arms around his neck and whispered next to his ear, "Relax, I know you plan to meet someone there... I won't interfere with you, and maybe I can help you."

...

The news about Roland's coronation and wedding stirred up all the people, including both the officials and civilians.

However, the king himself was completely unaware of this.

A week later, a shallow water gunboat, the Roland, arrived at the City of Evernight in the Northern Region.

Someone's peace was about to be shattered.

Chapter 1012: Olivia

Walking in the alleys, Olivia heard the snow scrunch under her feet. She felt her chest grow warmer.

Every winter in the Northern Region, she found the sky to be gloomy. It was like a stone roof that covered her from above. Furthermore, all things on the ground below would be covered in snow. Apart from this dull seasonal landscape, she would also suffer from hunger and cold. This made winter a long and tiresome experience for everyone.

Fortunately, this winter, she saw a brand new color in this gray world.

It was even brighter than a rainbow and shone through the snow storm like a dazzling star.

When she was near it, she could hardly wait to get closer to it.

It came out from the little cottage she had rented.

If she did not have to make a living for her family, she would never want to take one step away from it.

It was her baby.

It was Gerald Wimbledon's son.

Every time when she held him in her arms, she felt as if she was holding the whole world.

Thinking of her baby, Olivia subconsciously quickened her pace.

However, after she turned into the last alley, her heart sank to the bottom.

She spotted many footprints in the snow. They appeared to have come from another alley and led directly to the courtyard ahead.

This courtyard was where she and her son were currently living.

Here, all their neighbors were ordinary civilians. They seldom

got visitors even during spring and summer, not to mention the Months of Demons. She could not understand why so many footprints had suddenly appeared here.

The next moment, she felt faint as she realized something. An inexplicable fear filled her heart.

"No, it can't be true. Calm down..." She kept telling herself that they must have just been a bunch of robbers or refugees. Though this thought would make others afraid, it conversely would make her feel relieved.

She entered the courtyard, shivering. Unfortunately, what she saw immediately shattered her last hope.

Many patrol team members were standing in front of her cottage. Most of them wore soft armors but one of them was apparently a knight. He dressed differently and wore a special badge which indicated that he served the Kant family, who ruled the Northern Region.

"No—!"

All of a sudden, Olivia felt a burst of strength that came out of nowhere. She dropped the baby food that she had made great efforts to buy, lowered her head and dashed toward the door!

At that moment, she thought she was going to her death.

She was prepared to throw herself at the blade once someone pulled out their sword to block her, even if they did not mean to kill her on the spot.

Unexpectedly, no one stood out to stop her from rushing into the cottage. Instead, the crowd turned to the side to let her through.

At the door of the cottage, she stumbled over the threshold, tearing her dress as her knees bruised from contact with the cold grindstone-like ground. Enduring the physical pain, she crawled non-stop toward the small bedroom with a face full of tears. She just wanted to meet her child for the last time, but when she

entered the room, she was stunned.

A cyan-haired young lady sat at the head of the bed whilst coaxing the baby. The nanny Olivia had hired to take care of the child was standing by her side, displaying a look of respect, which one would use to their real boss.

The lady raised her head and glanced at Olivia. Instantly, she understood that the lady was very peculiar. She found the lady to be beautiful but could not describe her with any words that were usually used to depict a woman. She could not say that the lady was mild, fragile, charming or emotional. Even when she held the baby in her arms, she did not have the look of motherly love in her eyes at all.

It seemed as if she was playing with a toy rather than amusing a child.

"Nice to meet you," the young lady said slowly. "My name is Edith Kant. You should have heard of my name."

"The Pearl of the Northern Region—" Olivia's heart skipped a beat. "She's the eldest daughter of Duke Kant, the legendary woman who can lead knights to charge in a battle?" Edith Kant was a household name in the Northern Region. Even Gerald had mentioned her to Olivia many times.

Some people even stated that she was a more difficult opponent than her father.

"Nice to meet you, your ladyship," said Olivia as she swallowed hard. She bent over to give a kowtow before asking, "Would you please tell me why you've come to my home?"

Edith waved her hand to the nanny. The nanny bowed and then she swiftly left the room, shutting the door.

Seeing that, Olivia confirmed that this nanny must have been sent by the Kant family.

Her child had been under their control all this time.

"Well, to make a long story short, the king ordered me to take this offspring of the Wimbledon family back to Neverwinter."

"And then... you'll execute him secretly?" Olivia asked while breathing hard.

"If I wanted to kill him, I could do it anywhere. I wouldn't have to show up at your home at all." Edith unraveled the cloth around the baby's head and revealed his soft gray hair. "His Majesty needs him to appease the people. That's all."

Olivia was dumbfounded. She could not get what Edith meant. "Your ladyship, I still... don't understand..."

"It's not as complicated as you may think." The Pearl of the Northern Region shrugged. "Have you ever heard about witches?"

...

After hearing the whole story, Olivia still spent a long time connecting the two together. She had never heard such an implausible plan! Roland Wimbledon was determined to marry a witch, so he decided to use Gerald's son to quell the doubts of the public. She was not familiar with nobles' way of doing things, but she instinctively felt something wrong in this arrangement.

She wondered, "As a king, does he really have to do this?"

She clenched her teeth and plucked up her courage before asking, "Your ladyship, forgive me for being bold. I can hardly believe this decision. Maybe His Majesty thinks that he needs the baby now, but what if he changes his mind in the future, Schelo will..."

"Schelo? Is it his name?" Edith raised her eyebrow. "It seems that you still don't understand your current situation. It's His Majesty's command, you can't disobey it. Now, you've only two choices. No.1, you can get a large sum of hush money for which you must leave the kingdom and never come back again. Or No.2, you can accompany him to Neverwinter, but you must hide your identity and claim to be a maid of a noble family."

Tears were welling up in Olivia's eyes. Granted her low status, she could never become a part of the royal family. "Who will take my place to take care of him?"

"Nobody," replied Edith.

"What?" She promptly lifted her head in surprise. Her tears had yet to stop as they rolled down her cheeks.

"His Majesty isn't that cruel. If you choose to stay with the baby, you just need to conceal the fact that you are his real mother. Apart from that, you don't have to change anything. You can still look after him and watch him grow up. The noble family you served has already been eliminated by the church and Gerald's widow entrusted the child to you. That will be your story." Edith paused for a moment before adding, "In addition, the king has already spread this news to all regions of the kingdom. In two or three days, you'll hear about it here in the Northern Region. If His Majesty really wanted you to die, why would he bother to tell this story to all his subjects?"

Does the Pearl of the Northern Region mean that... His Majesty did this just to assure me that we'll be safe?

Olivia touched her chest and recalled the night she had been in despair and had come to Prince Roland asking for help. Back then, he had indeed helped her. She did not know whether he had some ulterior motive at the time, but she had to admit that if it had not been for Roland, she would have been beaten to death by the tavern owner a long time ago.

She took a deep breath and wiped the tears from her face. Her legs got numb after kneeling down for such a long time, but she still managed to control her body well enough to rise slowly from the ground. "Your ladyship, may I ask... Does this child have any chance to become a king?"

"No." A meaningful look flickered in Edith's eyes. "Before I set off, His Majesty exhorted me to tell you that you'd better not have any

illusion of the throne. Otherwise, you'll be very disappointed. Of course, this is just between us. Don't breathe a word to anyone else."

"No, your ladyship. I'll never be disappointed, as long as my son can grow up safely. That's my greatest wish," said Olivia with difficulty. She got slower and slower, as if she had to exert all her strength to say each word. "But, bringing him to Neverwinter can't solve all the problems. What if someday His Majesty changes his mind and decides to make his own child the legitimate heir to the throne. When that happens, my son will become a thorn in their flesh and won't be able to survive!" She looked directly into Edith's eyes and stressed each word with due strength. "I know I can't change a thing, but if you can't give me a reasonable explanation, please kill me right now!"

"Oh?" Edith squinted her eyes.

It was a bloodthirsty look.

In front of Edith, Olivia was as weak as a lamb.

But she still refused to back down. She stood tall before the Pearl of the Northern Region and said, "If you can't, it means the things I'm worried about will happen sooner or later. I can't set Gerald Wimbledon's only son on such a path, your ladyship!"

Olivia did not want to take her child to Neverwinter while worrying that he would be executed a dozen years later. She did not like such long-term psychological tortures, nor did she want to make such a groundless decision by herself. Given her status, she did not expect Edith to give an answer. She believed that even if Edith did have an explanation, she would never tell it to a maid of humble origin. However, she still demanded an explanation from her since that was all she could do for now. She closed her eyes, waiting for a cold blade to cut her throat. I'm sorry, Gerald. I'm so sorry... my dear. I can't change anything.

The baby suddenly woke up and cried. It was as if he felt the

departure with his mother coming.

Olivia tried her best to stop herself from opening her eyes.

She was afraid that if she took a look at the baby again, she would hesitate.

After a long time, the blade still did not arrive.

Edith chuckled and said, "I can."

Olivia stared at her in disbelief.

The Pearl of the Northern Region used lip language to tell Olivia the answer. It was completely beyond her imagination, but she somehow believed this incredible explanation at once, just like a drowning person who clutched the straw.

She felt that she was persuaded by herself instead of being persuaded by Edith.

The Pearl of the Northern Region turned away and walked toward the door, leaving the crying baby to Olivia. "We'll set out three days later. Remember to pack for your trip."

"Your ladyship..." Olivia murmured when Edith walked past her. "The tavern owner as well as one of His Highness Gerald's guards probably know the truth about me and the child."

"I'll take care of it. You don't have to worry," replied Edith without looking back.

When the Pearl of the North left, Olivia held her baby in a warm embrace, as if she was afraid that he would disappear at any minute. The baby finally quieted down and buried his head in her chest.

Her heart was racing, she could not help asking herself if it was true.

She deciphered the explanation by reading Edith's lips.

It was a simple but fascinating phrase.

"Eternal life."

This was the king's answer.

Chapter 1013: The Future of the Northern Region

Duke Calvin was waiting in the main hall when Edith returned to the castle.

"You only plan to stay in the City of Evernight for three days? It sounded to me that this mission will take time. You don't have to go back immediately. Why don't you stay here longer?"

"Father, did you send someone to listen in on my conversation?" Edith asked with a frown.

"If I ask you directly, will you explain everything to me clearly?" The Duke gave her a furious glare before adding, "I learned this trick from you. It's better to search for the answer than to wait for it."

The Pearl of the Northern Region replied with a bark of laughter, "Congratulations, you finally made some progress. Now, I don't have to worry too much about you in Neverwinter."

The duke grunted, "You haven't answered my question. I can't stop you, but why do you have to take Lance to Neverwinter. Are you that attracted to Wimbledon? He would rather marry a witch than marry you. I don't get it. What the hell is the point of bringing Gerald's son to Neverwinter?"

"You seem to be very unhappy with the fact that I can't become queen," Edith shot him a sideways glance and said. "Or perhaps, you're just complaining that my future child can never become the heir to the throne? I still remember what you said to me when Timothy came to the Northern Region, and I know what you suggested to His Majesty."

"I... I did that for your own good. Are you willing to see a humble maid bring her son to power?" Calvin sounded much less aggressive now.

Edith secretly sighed. She knew that her father cared about her very much but she found that he was quite short-sighted. Calvin Kant was a caring father but he was not a wise man.

Fortunately, the other nobles in the Northern Region were no better than him. Most of them were not capable enough to manage their own domains. Edith agreed with His Majesty's decision to abolish the aristocratic system. She thought that if she was the king, she would also not be able to tolerate such a group of idiots wasting her wealth.

She understood the conventional thoughts of a traditional noble man, but she just couldn't say anything remotely nice to comfort her father at this moment. She enjoyed using her words as swords to hurt and torture others and sometimes even herself.

"A humble maid? No, father, you're wrong. Gerald Wimbledon loved her for a reason," said Edith, with interest. "That woman just lacks a status. If she was born into a noble family of the Northern Region, she would become more capable than you, not to mention my two younger brothers. In fact, what you should be the most thankful for is the ancestors of the Kant family. Without your title as an earl, you would never have gotten what you have today. You probably wouldn't live any better than the ordinary traders on the streets."

Just as she had expected, her father now looked very sour.

"She was reluctant to trust me at first, but once she made up her mind, she gave me all the names of the people who may ruin her and her son's future. What a decisive woman! If Gerald's son comes to power one day, what will she do to me? After all, I once bullied her into going to Neverwinter with me." Edith chuckled. "How will she torture me to vent her anger? Being a woman herself, she must know how to make a woman suffer."

"Enough... I know I was wrong," Calvin finally admitted defeat. "Can you stop talking?"

"Whew," Edith heaved a long sigh. "By the way, he'll never seize the throne. Even if His Majesty doesn't mind it, I would never allow it to happen." She smoothed out her hair and walked to her father. "Let's get back to business. I must return to Neverwinter as soon as possible since I don't want to miss any new changes in the city. Neverwinter is a fast-developing place and the center of the power. Half a month is already long enough. If His Majesty had not sent me to complete this task, I wouldn't have come back at all. As for Lance, I've already asked you to send him to Neverwinter when he turns 18 in the letter. You have a really bad memory."

"But if I send Lance to Neverwinter, the Northern Region will—"

"You'll lose your successor?" Edith interrupted. "But father, the rank of nobility has now become a pure honorary title. If your son is uneducated, do you think he can gain a firm footing in the City Hall? I take him away for the future of the Kant family. We've got a lot to learn in Neverwinter and if we don't want to get kicked out of the game, we have to embrace all the new changes."

The Duke still seemed hesitant. "Didn't His Majesty say that some formidable enemies are lurking in the Barbarian Land? Have you ever thought about it. What if Neverwinter is conquered by these enemies?"

"It's simple. When that happens, all of us will be doomed. At that time, it'll be meaningless even if you have a dozen of successors," Edith said while laying out her hands in a shrug. "And I think we should thank the demons."

"What...?" Calvin was surprised.

"I've a feeling that if it wasn't for the demons, His Majesty would turn all the four kingdoms upside down..." the Pearl of the Northern Region said, her mouth twitched. "He needs to focus on defeating the demons now and thus chooses to make peace with the nobles. But one day, after he eliminates the demons, he'll bring drastic change to the entire world. Keeping this in mind, the

demons are actually helping us by giving us more time to keep up with the trend of development. This is our only chance. You should know what to do."

The Duke sighed after a long silence. "Provide preferential treatment to the teachers from Neverwinter, open more primary education classes, and send more people to study in the Western Region. Oh, and listen to the City Hall officials' advice... You've mentioned those things in the letters a number of times. My memory is not that bad."

"It's good you can remember that." Edith patted her father's shoulder and then walked upstairs. "I need to get some sleep now. I've many things to do tonight."

"Wait..." Calvin turned around and said. "As for the tavern maid's... I mean, Olivia's last question, I'm also curious. How did you respond to it at the time?"

"It's better to look for the answer than to wait for it—" Edith smiled slightly. "You've just made some progress. Now please continue your strong performance."

"Hey, it's just casual talking. Wait... do you keep silent deliberately?" The Duke stood agape and then he realized something. "You did this on purpose to shut me up? Well, well, I promise I won't send anyone to overhear your talking. Now, can you tell me? My sweet daughter!"

"Forget about it, father. It's not important." Edith paused before murmuring, "I hope it's true, unfortunately..."

"What...?" Calvin pursued.

The Pearl of the Northern Region did not reply. She just waved her hands and disappeared at the end of the stairs.

Chapter 1014: The Day of Adulthood

Neverwinter was busy preparing for Roland's coronation ceremony.

After releasing the news, the king left the whole thing to Barov. The City Hall Director devoted himself entirely to the preparation job and strived for perfection in every detail. He even fetched Blanche, the ceremonial officer, from the old king's city to assist him.

As for Roland, apart from occasionally checking the progress of the magic movie, he spent most of his time on the final design of the internal combustion engine.

Because of the difference in measurement systems between the current world and his previous world, he needed to conduct a stability test for each prototype he made to make sure that his design was accurate. Furthermore, since the quality of the oil separated by the fractional process was very unstable, he had to adopt a redundancy design method. Without computer simulation techniques, he had to adjust the prototypes repeatedly.

He created a prototype, tested it and then improved it or scrapped it. He repeated this process again and again, which made him feel as if he had returned to his schooling days. He rushed about between the castle and the north slope backyard every day, living a busy and full life. The knowledge that he had forgotten a long time ago became vivid in his head once more.

Unlike his schooling days, this time he had a great companion, Anna.

She was as enthusiastic about new things as he was.

She was so absorbed in assembling the precision components. Even when she stopped to wipe the sweat from her nose, she would still have her eyes fixed on what she was working on. Seeing this,

Roland felt amazed. He found that her thirst for knowledge and creation was as strong as her Blackfire.

And he thought she looked exceptionally attractive when she was so earnest in bringing to life her creations.

Whenever they made a progress, Anna would smile so brightly that Roland would believe nothing, not even becoming the queen of Graycastle, could make her that happy.

She had expressed such a thought before. As long as they could stay together, she would not care about the title.

However, Roland still wanted to give her the title as a way of externalizing his commitment to her.

After all, this was a common practice in human society.

After revising the dimensions of the engine, he put down the quill and rubbed his sore neck.

If nothing else, the design could be finalized this time. The last batch of prototypes had run stably for a reasonable period of time. It had only been a few days but was already enough to meet the current needs of the city.

Internal combustion engines, the second-generation power source, worked much more efficiently than steam engines, but in terms of structure, the former were not very different from the latter, except that the latter needed some external equipment such as a boiler and a steam transport pipe. No matter how well-designed a steam engine was, it could not prevent the energy loss caused by the transportation of steam. An internal combustion, however, contained the fuel inside its cylinder. In this way, all the heat generated by the fuel could be used to push the piston.

The mixture of oil and air would burn violently inside the cylinder. When the air became hot, its volume would increase rapidly to drive the piston. Meanwhile, the air pressure inside the cylinder would fall and thus fresh fuel would be sucked into the

cylinder. It sounded like a simple process but it was not an easy project. For example, it had a brand new requirement, the sealing. In an early steam engine, one could easily insert a finger into the gap between the piston and the cylinder wall, and both felt and linen could be used to block the gap. However, such a gap would never be allowed in an internal combustion engine.

This was because it was powered by the fuel inside itself. Once its cylinder had a leak, it would stop working.

Given the high demand for material and manufacturing technology, internal combustion engines came several decades after the electric motors in the previous world where Roland had lived.

Roland had two designs for the first-generation internal combustion engines: cylinder-in-line and cylinder-in-circle. The former one was cumbersome and made of cast iron. It was stable and suitable for the factories. The latter was also known as a star engine. It had shorter crankshafts and a compact structure, so it was smaller in size and very suitable for aircraft. As it was made of aluminum alloy, only Anna could process this delicate engine for now.

Now that he could consult a large number of reference material in the Dream World, he developed these two types of engines at the same time. Compared to the tortuous experience of manufacturing the steam engines, this time, his design job was much easier.

The Senior Demon's words were another reason for him to speed up the engine development process.

This expedition had already proved that it was hard to rely solely on the ground-to-air firearms to resist all the attacks from the sky.

If his plan could be realized, for the first time ever, mankind in this world would have an air force that could contest with the demons riding flying mounts.

"Your Majesty, don't move."

Nightingale suddenly spoke.

Roland immediately froze up and moved his eyes to look back.

Is there...an enemy?

Soon he saw Nightingale approach and reach her hand into his hair, and then he felt a little pain from his head. It turned out that she had just plucked off a hair.

"Ugh, is it a white hair?" Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Since his hair color was light gray, a white hair should not be very conspicuous on his head. But Nightingale could easily recognize this white hair because it was dry and lost all its luster from its root.

"And there's more on your head." Nightingale continued to search inside his hair for a while. "Have you been having trouble sleeping recently?"

"Have I?"

"You used to sleep late in the winter, but recently you've been getting up earlier than me every day. At night, you have to enter the Dream World to study. That isn't really sleeping, is it?" Nightingale said. "You've yawned a lot recently, which means you are very tired. You are getting white hair in your twenties. That's not a good sign."

Roland felt very relieved looking at her even to the point that his work-induced weariness faded. She still cared about him as much as she did previously and his coming marriage did not affect her very much. Roland guessed that it must have had something to do with the agreement between Anna and her.

"Don't worry. I've not reached my limit yet. I've experienced it before."

"..." Nightingale looked puzzled, but apparently she could tell that it was not a lie.

Roland did tell her the truth. "Generally speaking, when I reach my limit, I'll have a palpitation and feel as if my chest is empty. After that, I need to be extra careful since I'll feel weak and sometimes, I'll start coughing a lot and even cough blood—ahem —"

Halfway through the speech, he suddenly coughed violently.

"Hey, are you alright?" Nightingale got nervous and patted his back. "Do you need me to fetch Nana for you?"

Roland took a deep breath. "No... I'm fine. I just choked on my saliva."

"Really?"

"Relax, I—"

He turned around and stiffened with embarrassment at once. He was surprised to find that Nightingale was so close to him at this moment. They looked into each other's eyes and simultaneously held their breath.

"Your Majesty." Just at this moment, Wendy opened the door and walked into the office. "I need to tell you something... Uh? What are you doing?"

"What?" Roland blinked only to find that Nightingale had already disappeared. Now, he was bending backwards while holding his head back, which was a really weird-looking posture.

"His Majesty is practicing gymnastics," said Nightingale, who was lying on the couch beside the tea table and chewing her dried fish leisurely. "He's been in his chair for a long time and got sore, so he decided to be the first to try his gymnastics."

"Oh, I see," Wendy said thoughtfully. "Is this the gymnastics you wanted to promote in the school? But... do you really think that

such a strange pose will work?"

"Ugh, it works. Trust me." Roland returned to a normal sitting position. He felt that Nightingale, who was acting innocent, was trying her best to hold back laughter. "Well, what did you want to tell me?"

"Your Majesty," said Wendy, while leafing through the record book in her hand. "According to the records of the previous year, today is Lightning's Day of Adulthood."

Chapter 1015: Soaring Through the Skies

(Part I)

The coming of age for witches had always happened at the stroke of midnight.

This can be considered one of the unsolved mysteries of the witches. Even though magic power exists everywhere, there was no way to explain why it was the most active at this time. Even witches like Anna with immense magic reserves could entirely exhaust their magic power and still fully recover within an hour or two after midnight. On the contrary, if the witches' magic power only recovered at the pace during the day, then even a week's time would probably still not be enough for them to get back to full strength.

Most of the witches did not care about this, and the Taquila survivors were no exception. When Roland asked them about it, the answers they gave were always along the lines of "isn't that just the start of a new day?" For most people, time was divided into days. Therefore, the magic power of each day should be spent on that same day. Just like the weather showing changes every day, there was nothing weird about this to them.

But Roland knew that the days were nothing but a human construct created out of convenience. This lead to the creation of the leap year. To correct this error, people came up with the leap month and with the advancement of the time-measuring apparatus, leap seconds were also invented(i.e., 59 or 61 seconds in the last minute). Basically, people created whatever would make life easier for them.

With that said, it was strange that the witches' magic power would only consolidate within a certain period of time.

It was as if there exists a biological clock in every Awakened so that she could always remain in sync with the flow of time.

Regardless of when she was born and whether she lived in the Southernmost Region or the Hermes Plateau, she would always be linked to this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of more advanced observational devices such as the further research of magic power or the accurate measuring of time, both would be too difficult to accomplish at this time; so this theory would just remain a theory.

"Your Majesty." Wendy's words pulled him back to reality from his thoughts. "In addition to the above-mentioned measures, would you like to add anything else?"

The so-called measures were mainly designed to deal with the dangers of consolidating one's magic power. Since Lucia's Day of Adulthood, this factor had already been incorporated as part of the Witch Union's standard protocol.

Even Taquila could not provide much more in terms of advice regarding this point.

"Let's proceed according to your plan." Roland thought for a moment and said, "By the way, don't forget to inform Margaret and Sander Flyingbird. I think they would also like to know that Lightning has safely reached adulthood."

Wendy was a little surprised. "Ms. Margaret would not a problem, but as for Mr. Flyingbird..."

"He'll be fine," Roland said softly.

"Yes, I understand." Upon seeing his expression, Wendy no longer asked any more questions and agreed without further ado.

...

Night had long since fallen, yet the top floor of the Witch Building was still bright as day.

The top floor had already been transformed into a bedroom for the witches to use for adulthood. The room was the size two

normal rooms so that it could accommodate more visitors, and the wall became a moveable door. If magic needed to be released, the two door panels could be opened directly, and the outer wall would no longer be blasted apart like last time.

Lightning laid on a large, soft bed, and seemed to be extremely excited. This was the exact opposite of Lucia's nervous behavior when she was going through her coming of age. It seemed as if the young explorer had been waiting for this moment for a very long time.

A wooden table was fixed next to the big bed, with Lightning's left hand tied onto it. She held the Sigil of God's Will in her hand. According to Lucia, the moment painful contractions could be felt in her body, would be the moment when she would need to pour all the magic power into the Sigil. One hand was tied to avoid the young witch from losing control due to the intense pain, and inadvertently pointing the Sigil at others. After this danger was eliminated, the absence of Countess Spear and her powers was no longer that big of a deal.

Lightning was surrounded by her friends who had come to visit.

"Will I awaken with some derivative skill? If it can solve the weight problem, then I would be able to bring along a lot more food and tools to fly over the Land of Dawn!" Conversations on similar topics like that continued throughout the night. Lightning's fluttering eyes seemed to shine as she listed out one possibility after another. She looked just like Roland back when he was a child and was trying to guess what kind of birthday presents his family had prepared for him.

But of course, he would end up disappointed most of the time.

For example, if he were hoping to receive a huge Transformer model, he would instead receive a prep-book with over 300 exercises.

"There might not be any derivative skill," Mystery Moon

muttered, "how can a derivative skill be that easy to obtain? Only a few people have this talent in the whole of Neverwinter."

"Ahem..." After this sentence, Roland seemed to hear a nasally voice, full of pride in her rising tone.

"Watch your words!" Lily stared at her.

"Mystery Moon isn't completely wrong," Agatha said with a laugh. "The Union had some research statistics. A witch who can awaken a derivative skill when she becomes an adult is about one in a hundred, but compared to the raise in rank, this is nothing. The most important thing for witches is the ultimate ability to expand their main magic power, so you don't have to worry too much about it and just focus on consolidating your magic power."

"By the way, weren't the Union witches trying to analyze the process of the witches' adulthood?" Scroll interjected and asked, "How were the results?"

"What we found can only be used for reference. After all, there aren't enough examples to verify it," said Wendy, looking at the record book, "but Lightning's score is really high. 85.9 points."

"Eh? What's that about?" Andrea asked curiously.

"It's an assessment method we came up with," said Agatha. "It was also a revelation from Lucia—Because the surge of magic power during adulthood is very obvious, it'd theoretically be easier to consolidate. We took all the promotion of Senior Witches as samples. A preliminary assessment was made, and points were scored based on the four factors of total magical power, academic scores, control ability, and individual will. Of course, we're still at the guessing phase at the moment."

"Academic scores... Do you mean test results?"

"Yes. That's the largest part of the assessment."

"I see... That means someone can never even hope to surpass the Transcendent in this life." Andrea glanced at Ashes with pity.

The latter just shrugged.

"This is... crazy." Roland suddenly heard Phyllis sigh.

"What's wrong?" He turned towards Phyllis.

"In the Taquila age, high-level evolution was an extremely sacred thing for every witch. Everyone was eager to win the favor of the deities but never dared to openly talk about it, because it just seemed like such a distant dream. If any witch dared to tell others that she was confident of evolving her powers, she would surely be scoffed at by other people. But now..." Phyllis murmured for a bit then recovered her senses. "Sorry, I'm not saying that it's not good, but the contrast between the two situations made me think..."

"I know what you mean." Roland smiled lightly. "It's like a merchant who woke up one day and found that the gold royals that he'd saved with his blood and sweat were no longer valuable. This would certainly be difficult for people to come to terms with."

"On this point, I really can't compare to Lady Agatha," Phyllis whispered. "She had only come here a year earlier than me, but now she's already in charge of the High Awakening research. She's undoubtedly the genius of the Union."

"Actually, this isn't that difficult to understand. If we're not stronger than our predecessors, how can we improve?" He said frankly, "As long as we're still moving forward, this kind of scenario will continue to appear. Just look at them, doesn't this feel like what hope is?"

Phyllis followed his glance and also looked at the girl on the bed.

"But the more ability you have, the better it is, right?" Lightning said confidently. "I think that not only will I consolidate my magic power, but I'll also gain several derivative skills because the most outstanding explorer will surely get the most rewards!"

"Yeah!" Maggie who was standing at the bedside also raised her arms, in support of the latter.

"That's not how logic works!" Complained Mystery Moon.

The room suddenly became boisterous.

Roland looked at the lively scene, shook his head with a smile, and headed toward the door.

"Are you not going to go in?"

After closing the door, he spoke to a man who stood in the corridor against the wall.

That person was Thunder.

Chapter 1016: Soaring Through the Skies (Part II)

The explorer was still dressed like a wanderer. He was covered in feathers and wore an eye patch embroidered with rose petals on his right eye. No one would be able to recognize that he was Thunder from his appearance. Roland could not figure out why, but his image was a stark contrast from the way he was at the banquet.

"When you're disguising to be another person, you need to devote your heart and soul to become that character, so that you can deceive even yourself. Only then would you be able to fool other people. This was the first thing that I learned when I was learning how to disguise myself." Thunder inhaled his cigarette, and the weak red light looked like a looming firefly in the dark walkway. "Your Majesty, I'm afraid I can't concentrate on disguising myself as Sander Flyingbird right now... She will certainly see through it."

So that sense of strangeness was due to this. Roland realized that because there were certain dangers in a witch's adulthood, Thunder could no longer pretend to be an outsider and be pay no attention to his daughter.

If he showed too much concern, then it would become obvious that he was not the real Sander Flyingbird.

"Don't tell me that you want to keep hiding your identity?" Roland raised an eyebrow. "You should've heard what Lightning said just now. She's destined to become an explorer."

This question made Thunder silent for a long time.

Just as Roland thought that he would not reply, Thunder suddenly spoke up: "Your Majesty, do you believe in fate?"

At that moment, Roland had some doubts about the identity of Thunder the Explorer.

Isn't this a classic starting line when preaching?

Of course, similar questions were also common in the love letters of high school students.

However, Thunder was certainly not seeking for an answer. "I've been told that geniuses will always die doing what they are best at, and God would make up for it by giving such people an unmatchable talent—This is fate. A road that's destined to be good will cause the one who walks on it to succumb to temptation because of one's extraordinary talent and eventually fall from grace. On the contrary, those ordinary people without much talent will tend to live longer."

"Who said that?" Roland could not help but ask.

"Sander, a person who introduced me to the path of an explorer." Thunder then breathed out a puff of smoke.

"Wait, there is such an explorer in the Fjords? Aren't you afraid that Lightning might've heard of his name?"

"He's been dead for a long time, and his identity remained obscure until and even after his death... By the standards of the Fjords, he couldn't even be considered a true explorer." With the smoke swirling around, Thunder almost merged with the shadows on the walls. "Before he died, he still hadn't found a brand new island or an unmarked route on the map. Sander didn't care about reputation. He said that adventure itself was fun and that the lack of talent didn't matter. At least he wouldn't have to worry about having a short life."

Roland seemed to suddenly realize something. "How did he die?"

"He died trying to save me," Thunder said slowly. "The ship encountered an attack from the Sea Ghosts. When Sander dragged me back to the cabin, he got clawed by the Sea Ghost. Although the wound wasn't big, the herbs were useless in treating it. His flesh quickly rotted and stopped breathing three days later. At that time

he said to me that he died anyway doing what he was best at—He had no other outstanding qualities in life, other than his kindness."

"..." Roland suddenly did not know what to say.

"After Lightning was born, she had shown outstanding talents as an explorer. Whether it was identifying routes or drawing charts, she learned much faster than the average person." When Thunder said these words, his face revealed his complicated emotions. "When I learned that she'd awakened and become a witch, I became extremely worried. You should understand what this ability means to an explorer."

Indeed, if courage, curiosity, and knowledge were the intrinsic natures of human beings, that meant anyone could acquire them, given time. But having magic power could be said to be a gift from the deities.

"That's why I made this decision," said Thunder said as he raised his head, and the light in his eyes seemed to reflect the red light in the pipe. "If fate is hard to avoid, I might be able to cut it off in another way—if I can uncover the veils of those mysterious places before Lightning sets out to be an explorer, the chances of her encountering danger would be greatly reduced. Leaving aside the land occupied by the demons, no one has yet set foot in the east of the Sealine, and the bold cliff seen from the Shadow Seacity ruins. Once you defeat the demons, I should be able to draw a map of these two places. Before that, however, it would be the best if I traveled alone."

If there was no more need for expeditions, there would naturally be no risk. This logic made Roland dumbfounded for a moment.

Although the world might be much larger than even what Thunder had imagined, it was still amazing for him to have such thoughts. This took more than just courage.

Gravity firmly anchored everyone onto the ground, but it certainly could not limit the wild dreams of some people

Thunder was obviously amongst the most capable of those who dared to dream.

—Flying was not just a witch's privilege.

"In that case, I shall leave her in your hands, Your Majesty," Thunder said, grabbing his chest.

At this instant, a loud noise came from inside the room.

Roland nodded at Thunder before returning to the bedroom.

One side of the wall had already been pushed open, but he did not hear the Sigil of God's Will being triggered.

"Your Majesty," said Wendy excitedly. "Lightning her... her magic has consolidated!"

Here was another witch who was evolved on the Day of Adulthood. He saw a clear excitement in the eyes of Agatha and Wendy, as this meant that their research was indeed feasible.

"Really?" Roland walked over to the bedside and looked at the eager-looking girl. "Was there any discomfort?"

"Not at all," Lightning patted her chest and said, "I feel like I'm full of power! It's a pity that I couldn't release the Sigil. Lighting the fourth stone was already the limit."

"That's good to hear," Roland let out a deep breath and said, "then you should take a rest today, and tomorrow you can—"

"Your Majesty, I'd like to try it now. May I?!" Lightning jumped out of bed. "I feel like my something is calling me and I can't help but want to fly immediately!"

"Is she talking about the magic power within her?" Roland couldn't help but laugh. She was certainly the most energetic member of the Witch Union. Since she had already said that, he had no reason to refuse. "Take Maggie with you, and don't fly too far away."

"Yes!"

"Coo!"

One side of the wall was still half-open, and after Maggie became a pigeon, she landed on Lightning's head—Lightning then held the pigeon with both of her hands and swiftly flew out of the room and disappeared into the cold and windy night sky.

"I don't know what her ability will be like after her consolidation..." Wendy murmured as she stared into the night sky. "We'll be busy tomorrow."

"Please also let me observe with the Five-Colored Stone during the test," Phyllis said.

"Anyways, let's stop here for today, and the rest can wait until tomorrow—"

Just as Roland was in the middle of his sentence, a thunderous explosion sounded through the sky!

The force of the sound was so strong that it was if all those present could actually feel it! The snow on the roof was shaken and became white fog. Ice was falling like raindrops. The glass windows of the castle cracked as if they had been smashed by an invisible giant hand.

While the witches were looking at each other dumbfounded, the echoes caused by the thunder roared back and forth continuously in the Impassable Mountain Range and did not disappear after a long time.

Chapter 1017: Derivative Skill

Just like Lucia's Day of Adulthood, Lightning's promotion was a joyous one, but it also caused a bit of trouble for Roland.

"Did anyone in the area get hurt last night?"

The next day, after listening to Barov's report, he could not help but raise his eyebrow.

"Yes, Your Majesty..." Roland could hear him lamenting from the other end of the phone. "An unlucky guy was planning to go to the toilet, but the explosion scared him so much that he fell and broke his foot. There are another two guys who rolled off their beds and hurt their heads. In the morning, a large group of anxious citizens came to the City Hall and asked if Neverwinter was being attacked by the demons or demonic beasts. The staff spent a great deal of effort before persuading them otherwise. Your Majesty, if such a thing were to happen in the future, could you kindly tell me beforehand?"

Roland could just see Barov's woeful face even through the earpiece.

The chief himself was probably scared out of his wits and couldn't wait for the sunrise.

"How are the wounded now?"

"They've all been sent to the hospital. Their lives aren't in danger, but the citizens are still talking about it. In the central square, people are still crowded in front of the bulletin boards and waiting for the announcements. This must've been caused by the witches' ability, right? If you'd informed me ahead of time, I wouldn't need to bother you in the aftermath of such a small incident."

"I know, but things related to magic are inherently unpredictable. It's not because I don't trust you." Roland consoled

him by saying, "As for the announcement, just tell the citizens that I'm researching new weapons, so there will be similar incidents in the future, so rest assured about their safety. When there's a real enemy attack, the emergency alert will be the sound. By the way, City Hall will pay for the medical expenses for those that got injured."

"Yes... Your Highness," Barov answered unwillingly.

Roland shook his head and hung up the phone.

Roland did not understand why the City Hall Director was starting to be quite clingy. Although he handled the government affairs well, this tone of "Your Majesty, I've dedicated my heart and soul to serving you, you can't let me down" gave Roland goosebumps.

On the contrary, his communication with Pearl of the Northern Region was much quicker and smoother.

He wondered where she was now.

As he recovered from his distractions, he looked at Lightning who was at the desk and playing with her hair. Roland asked laughingly, "You must've heard the conversation just now, right?"

"Oh..." the little girl said despairingly, "Your Majesty, I've made a mistake. Please punish me by making me do two exercises."

Roland once again turned his gaze to Maggie who was on top of her head, and she struggled to turn her gaze away, and put on a disinterested expression, "Coo—"

Although the members of the Exploration Group were close, when Maggie was faced with these mixed exercises, she chose to remain silent.

He tried to resist but still burst out laughing. "Haha... Come on and lift your head, it's not your fault—After all, I was the one who agreed to let you fly. I should also bear some of the responsibility."

"Rea... Really?" Lightning raised her head and her eyes sparkled.

"Of course, you didn't know that your new power would cause any harm. Anyways, the damage wasn't too bad, so you don't have to worry about the practice exercises."

As Lightning's flight route last night was towards the direction of the Impassable Mountain Range, the impact on the residential area was minimal—other than cracking some glass windows in the castle and the diplomatic building; the other buildings were still well intact. While passing through the Furnace Area, Lightning had already climbed to a certain height, so the damage was further reduced, and no additional damage was done.

"Your Majesty, you're really... so kind!" She seemed to have regained all her energy in that instant, and Maggie was so relieved that she spread her wings.

Seeing that both of them were about to tackle him, Roland quickly raised his hand and stopped them in their tracks. "But does high-speed flight really consume that much magic power? Didn't you only fly for fifteen minutes last night?"

As soon as he asked this, Lightning suddenly felt embarrassed. "I was very surprised as well. I wanted to leave part of my magic for testing at that time. I tried to speed it up to test where its limit was, but I didn't expect the magic power to be consumed so quickly, and I even almost fell out of the sky."

"Could you still get faster?" Wendy, who was recording her account, immediately raised a key point.

"Yes," said Lightning with confidence, "as long as I have enough magic—there wasn't even any sound of the wind in my ears at the time. I even felt that nothing would stop me from flying even faster."

"What about Maggie? Was she always squatting on top of your head?"

"Coo!" Before Lightning answered, Maggie had already turned and said, "Too fast, dizzy, bosom coo!"

Was she saying that it was too fast and uncomfortable, so she was taken into Lightning's arms? Roland realized that his ability to understand pigeon language had significantly improved and his mind could automatically fill in the blanks.

"You only felt dizzy?" Agatha, who was also in charge of the ability test, said, "Didn't you feel the change in the airflow?"

"Uhmm..." Lightning pondered for a moment and said, "although I was wearing wind goggles at the time, when I was halfway through, the wind seemed to have suddenly disappeared."

"What do you think?" Roland looked at the Ice Witch. "Was this type of derivative ability recorded in the Union?"

Lightning almost accidentally exhausted all of her magic power and had disrupted the assessment. But the Witch Union had already established a system of assessment procedures. That, together with the experience of the Union, would be enough to form a rough estimate using the Stone of Measuring even if the ability could not be displayed.

According to Lightning, she spent only about three minutes to cross the Impassable Mountain Range before she flew into the Barbarian Land. This part usually took about half an hour to travel. The thunder in the night sky could also confirm this—Her ability after evolving had given her the ability to break the sound barrier in flight.

Regarding the concept of sound barriers, Roland did not have to spend too much time on it— Agatha's ability to learn had always been one of the best among the witches. A little bit of explanation was enough for her to understand the reason for the thunder.

There were no shortages of creatures in nature that could reach the speed of sound in a short period, and even human beings had

managed to travel at the speed of sound in their flesh and bones. However, this did not mean that this could be easily achieved. There was no doubt that the reason why Lightning was not affected was related to her derivate ability after awakening.

"I think this would be 'magic synchronization.'" Agatha pondered for a moment then said, "This kind of derivative skill usually appeared in those witches whose main ability was dangerous to themselves. Hence, there weren't too many records about it. It'd usually expand into a cocoon and wrap witches in it, providing a safe environment within the cocoon. But maintaining it requires a lot of magic power. The bigger the gap between the internal and external environment, the higher the speed of magic consumption. In other words..."

"So Lightning exhausted her magic power in such a short time not because of the flight, but because of her derivative ability?" Wendy replied.

"That's right," Agatha nodded her head and said, "most derivative abilities were formed to aid the main ability, like Scroll's Book of Magic, and Lucia's colored world—Without them, the effect of the main ability would be greatly reduced and difficult to used to their potential. The synchronization of her magic powers was the same. Rather than incurring severe injuries, it would be a wiser decision to fly less instead.

Chapter 1018: Spread of News

"But my magic capacity can continue to grow through training, so there's no limit to the number of evolutions, right?" Lightning did not seem frustrated at all. "This is good—it makes me so excited thinking about being able to exceed my own limits! I can also be considered as half a combat witch now!"

"Battle coo!" Maggie chipped in.

"I know you're thrilled, but remember not to speed up over the castle and make trouble for His Majesty Roland again." Wendy coughed twice and said, "And you have to conserve your magic power for the next few days until we are finished with all the tests. Understand?"

"Yes, big sis Wendy." Lightning cheekily stuck out her tongue.

On the other hand, Roland had different a different view. Even though flying at supersonic speed could bring unparalleled mobility, once the magic power was exhausted, she could easily be forced into a dangerous situation. Lightning was also much smaller than an airplane, so it was still unclear now how much damage she could deal with a demon when she rams it after breaking the sound barrier. It was obviously not worthwhile to use her as a combat witch.

And those Magic Slayers that could easily disrupt the flow of magic power within a large area will always pose a huge threat to her.

What he was more concerned about was the duration at which she can maintain subsonic speed—the speed of 800 to 900 kilometers per hour was absolutely unprecedented in this era. Whether it was used expand the maps of the unexplored areas, or have her serve as a scout to make up for the battlefield blind spots of Sylvie's discovery area, it would certainly be much more efficient than to have her participate in battles.

When Lightning was about to leave, Roland suddenly stopped her.

"By the way, I have another question that I want to ask you," he said while considering the right words to use. "If... after ten years, the world no longer had any places to explore, what would you do?"

"No places... to explore?" Lightning was slightly surprised.

"Imagine if every continent has already been set foot on, every area of the sea has been recorded in detail on the charts, the entire world was crystal clear, and there are no longer any unknown places. Although that sounds a bit far-fetched, if it did happen, would you still want to become an explorer?"

"I see," the little girl suddenly realized, "what you meant to say was, what would I do if the Fjord explorers already discovered the entire land and sea during the Battle of Divine Will?"

"Uh... I guess you could put it that way." Roland was secretly baffled. He had already tried very hard to be indirect about it, yet she still understood the main point immediately. Peers in the same industry were certainly hard to deceive.

"Unless they are all as powerful as my father, but even so, I will continue to explore," Lightning said without hesitating, "because there are some places that only I can each, not even my father can do it."

"You mean..."

Lightning pointed to the top of her head and said with confidence, "There is still a big gap in the sky!"

Only when she left did Roland burst out laughing.

Should he say "like father like daughter?" Her tone was not only similar to Thunder's but was even stronger than his. He didn't know if the explorer's fate would be as Thunder described, but there was indeed truth in what she had said. In terms of the ability

to maneuver the skies, Lightning was certainly well above the rest.

"What're you laughing at?" Nightingale asked curiously.

He stood up, walked to the French window and looked at the cloudy sky. His glance seemed to have penetrated the clouds and reached further into the distance—although it was still elusive and mysterious, some people were already paying attention to it.

"I'm laughing at... how nice being young is," he said with emotion.

...

After dealing with Lightning's matters, Roland asked Wendy to stay behind.

"I intend to add a department in the City Hall." He went straight to the point. "In addition to dealing with emergencies like today, it'd also give the public a credible channel for discussion."

"You mean... it will be mainly used to announce messages?" asked Wendy.

"Yes, this department will be called the Ministry of Public Relations." Roland nodded and said, "However, the way it spreads news will be somewhat different—Firstly, if something is not an emergency, it'll no longer be announced through the bulletin board in the Central Square. Secondly, its content will not be limited to Neverwinter, some novelty events from other lands will also be included."

"If we don't publicize in the square, how do we let others know about it?" Nightingale pursed her lips.

Roland picked up a scrap of paper from the table and unfolded it in front of them. "We need a brand new method of spreading information—and that's the newspaper."

In fact, setting up bulletin boards in the central square and sending people to repeatedly announce the news was done only

because Roland had no other choice back then. The literacy rate of people in that era was extremely low. In such circumstances, word of mouth had become the only way to promote a decree.

However, with the rapid expansion of the urban population and the domains, this method could no longer keep up with the actual needs of the subjects—In the past, gathering 3,000 people would be enough to have the news spread to the whole city. But now, at least 80,000 to 90,000 people would be needed to cover the rapidly increasing population.

This not only exceeded the capacity of the central square, but the extraction of such a huge crowd also resulted in the suspension of Neverwinter's industrial operations.

Barov's report made him realize that the so-called "if you don't occupy publicity locations, then enemies will occupy it" was not just talk. If there were no reliable channel for discussion, various rumors would spread in the pub. These rumors would continue to brew, and it would be too late to stop them once they had spread.

Now that the education for primary education had already been carried out for two and a half years, the materials available to Neverwinter had become much richer than in previous years. The introduction of newspapers as a means of communication was then of course inevitable.

If the first step was the foundation for running newspapers, then the second step would be to ensure the efficiency of the channels that would issue these newspapers.

What does an official newspaper need? A large circulation and reporting of current content that would generate discussion. Therefore Neverwinter needed to have a large amount of paper and efficient printing technology.

The problem of paper could be easily solved. In the central and eastern developed commercial cities, paper products had already spread to the middle and upper-class families. He even

remembered Lucia's parents, who have passed away, used to run a paper mill in Valencia. According to the statistics of the City Hall, there were many migrated craftsmen from the East who had mastered papermaking. As long as those craftsmen were gathered together, the production capacity could be expanded, and they would soon meet the needs of large-scale distribution.

For Neverwinter, any problem that could be solved with money was not considered a problem.

The printing skill was even more straightforward. The movable metal type plus drum reels were all tried and tested technologies. The ink could be provided by Darkcloud which was theoretically even easier than papermaking.

But it was unnecessary to explain all these details to Wendy. Putting aside the technical aspects, newspapers still had to be written by people, so the most important thing was to find people to gather and record the news.

He asked Wendy to stay behind as he wanted her to pick out a few suitable candidates—whether it was the Witch Union or the Sleeping Spell, she understood the abilities of her sisters the most.

"I roughly understand what you mean..." After listening to Roland's explanation, Wendy pondered for a moment. "So you need a witch to get involved in this matter. She'd need to discover the incident when it's happening and also run faster than anyone else so that the message can be sent as soon as possible to the publicity department?"

"Ahem, she doesn't have to run fast." He almost choked on his own saliva. "As long as she knows where the incident is happening, she could dispatch someone else to send the message."

"In other words, she would be a core member of the Ministry of Public Relations? Well... I do have a suitable candidate in mind." Wendy laughed and said, "Your Majesty, what do you think... about Honey?"

Chapter 1019: The Secrets of the Witches

When Honey was summoned to the office, she was apparently very glad. Once she entered the office, she examined the mahogany table very carefully, as if she wanted to look through it.

"What's wrong?" Roland curiously asked, "Is there something about this table?"

"Do you put precious things inside?" Honey even sniffed at the table and asked, "Or does it maybe have some other functions, such as automatically heating up at night?"

"How could it..." he could not help laughing, "This is just an ordinary table. There is nothing but documents and official letters inside."

"Oh, really?" said Honey suspiciously. "Then why does Sister Nightingale bend over it for a long time every night?"

"Wait, what?" Roland and Wendy were stunned, while Nightingale immediately leaped up from the couch.

"Grayhair told me so when I trained it, although it could only express it with its actions." Honey replied seriously, "Sister Nightingale always sits in your place when nobody is around and leans her face on the table— Em—"

Before she could finish her words, Nightingale already jumped forward and covered her mouth tightly. "I, I was just a bit sleepy and leaned on the table for a while! How could a, a bird know what I was doing? You must have got it wrong!"

Wendy put her hand on the forehead, speechless.

"Ahem," Roland coughed and said. "Maybe Grayhair did not see it clearly? After all, it is very dark in the night..."

Honey mumbled in Nightingale's palm, "But Grayhair is an owl."

There was a brief silence in the office.

"Anyway, you should be mistaken," Roland cleared his throat and waved his hand at Nightingale who blushed at Honey's words. The latter stamped and disappeared into the Mist.

It seems that she will not show up for some time again.

"Really? I got it." Honey did not continue to ask, "If the table could heat up, I would have wanted one."

"Why?" asked Roland, raising his eyebrows, "Isn't there a heating system in both the Castle and the Witch Building?"

"But not in the garden. When Sister Leaf is away, it's very cold there. Grayhair and other birds have been unwilling to move as of lately. I was afraid that they would catch a cold, so I built a platform under the olive tree and slept with them in my arms. If the table could heat up, they'd be more comfortable."

"Is that why she was so interested in the table?" thought Roland. He noticed that there were several feathers on Honey's soft curly hair which looked like a disheveled nest at first glance. He realized that he had indeed ignored the living environment of the Animal Messengers. He thought that they had the ability to adapt to nature but ignored the fact that it violated natural rules to have them fly in the wind and snow during the Months of Demons.

"Although the table can't give out heat, I can have people build a heated brick bed in the garden," he laughed and gestured, "It'll be almost as large as a bed, so you can get all the animals you train to sleep on it. How about it?"

"Really?" Honey's eyes lighted up, "Thank you!"

"It's nothing, but can you really talk to them?"

Honey rubbed her head shyly, "In fact, as Sister Nightingale said, most animals can't speak, so they can only use simple actions to imitate what they see. I often fail to guess what they mean, so it can't be counted as a real conversation."

"I see, " thought Roland, "although the magic power can make

trained birds and beasts follow Honey's orders, it can't endow them with human-like intelligence and transform them into another species." He asked, "What if you order them to look for anecdotes and then indicate directions to you?"

"Anecdotes?"

Honey pondered for a while. While Roland was thinking how to explain the word "news", she suddenly asked, "Sister Wendy and Scroll often get together to drink and sing on the balcony once they get drunk. Is that an anecdote?"

"I've never heard of it." Roland was surprised. Wendy, as the head of the Witch Union, was gentle and warm as a spring breeze. As the Minister of Education and the teacher of primary courses for witches, Scroll was patient and full of intellectual beauty. She might not smile often, but she was concerned about every sister in the Union. It is difficult for him to imagine the scene of the time when they were drunk, and more than once, according to what Honey said. He could not help asking, "Why have I never heard them sing?"

"Because they generally meet when you're out. After all, only when Sister Nightingale is away, they can easily drink her beverage." Honey said, "They're not just singing. Greentail tells me that they sometimes talk about you— Em—"

This time it was Wendy who covered her mouth and explained, "I was only ha-happy for Your Majesty's achievements. What's more, she said that the bird can't speak, so how could they understand what we were talking about? "

"Greentail is a parrot..." Honey mumbled.

Seeing that everyone was falling into silence again, Roland quickly changed the topic and said, "Well, that is indeed an unusual anecdote. You're qualified."

"Qualified?" she asked confused.

"Wait, Your Majesty. I suddenly feel that it might be inappropriate for her to serve as the core member of the Ministry of Public Relations and Communications..." Wendy said, coughing.

"Don't worry. All articles are ultimately released only once they're reviewed. The newspaper will mainly about the public events. There won't be too much about the witches." Roland made the final decision, "In addition, common people can't enter the Castle District, so you can rest assured. After all, only her Animal Messengers can quickly get news from all over the country."

"Your Majesty, may I know what on earth you're talking about?" Honey shouted while raising her hand.

"Of course," Roland tried to suppress his smile. "It's a very interesting job. Come here and I'll explain it to you in detail."

With the news center and the newspaper printing technology, the next step is to recruit hands and establish an interview-writing system. Barov is undoubtedly the most appropriate one for the job. As for the position of the minister, Roland decided to take the position himself.

Taking into account the degree of acceptance of people, the newspapers would be issued only in Neverwinter once a week. In addition to the major events that take place in various locations, there would also be sections that would record non-governmental news and trivial things of life. With the official background of the City Hall, Roland believed that before long the newspaper would be the most credible channel of publicity, which would greatly improve the current lack of publicity. At the same time, it would also provide a wealth of talks for the public in the taverns as to squeeze the rumors out the market.

However, these were just official records. What Roland was more interested in were the words Honey had not finished.

Of course, he does not have to be in a rush. Since he would be the minister, he could summon Honey alone and ask her about the

hidden anecdotes. For instance, what did Wendy and Scroll say when they were drunk?

He was really curious about it.

Chapter 1020: Release Day

Victor sat in a private room of a tavern in Neverwinter, reading through the latest trade bills.

Unlike the noisy hall downstairs, this was undoubtedly a room of superior quality. With a woolen carpet on the floor and a heated brick bed underneath the soft couch, he would not feel a bit of coldness on his feet.

At his request, the tavern also installed a movable wooden table next to the soft couch, which could serve as a low table when needed. Especially in the winter with chilling wind and snow, leaning on the couch to work could be considered a kind of enjoyment.

At the moment, a plate of roasted chicken breast slices was placed next to his left hand, and a cup of dark purple Chaos Drinks on the right side. This meal was worth 10 gold royals, not to mention its taste.

As a jewelry trader on the surface, he was, in fact, the fourth son of the Lothar family. These expenses, which were a huge amount of money in the eyes of common people, were nothing to him. It has been his unconscious habit to spend gold royals on physical comforts. Whether it was worthwhile or not, it was not within his consideration.

After watching the debut of the giant machinery named "train" two months ago, he bought a room on the third floor of the tavern to serve as his business residence.

Of course, with his wealth, it was not difficult for him to buy one or two houses. Nevertheless, Victor preferred this sense of detachment—he could stay in a quiet state while feeling the noise and excitement downstairs at the same time. Compared with the huge mansions favored by traditional nobles, he has always been full of longing for places like taverns.

It was convenient for him to negotiate with various caravans in the tavern. However, there was another reason.

Nothing else could reflect the vigor and prosperity of a city more directly than a downtown tavern.

After reading the last page, Victor closed the sheepskin notebook in his hand and lifted the crystal clear drink. In the candlelight, the purple-red liquid was like a beautiful gemstone.

There was some trouble with the recent bills.

He has failed to purchase any gemstones in the Western Region for a long time.

The battle for the throne had caused great changes in Graycastle. The cities were destroyed in the war and the nobles no longer owned domains. These changes caused the price of luxury goods to keep falling. To maintain the original profit, he had to increase sales. Be that as it may, without gemstones, his jewelry craftsmen could not make any jewelry.

The Longsong Stronghold was originally one of his main gemstone sources. However, since Roland Wimbledon announced to build Neverwinter, the gemstones became increasingly scarce. Victor had gone to Longsong Area several times but found that all mining areas had been occupied by the young king. It was not strange, as the occupation of wealth was the common nature of lords. Nevertheless, all gemstones disappeared since they were transported out of the Border Area.

That is right. He has failed to find any jewelry shop in Neverwinter so far.

The king could either directly sell the gemstones or invest money to sell jewelry. If the king chose the former way, Victor could make profits by reselling the gemstones at a higher price. If it was the latter, he could cooperate with the king. Whether it was the selling channel or jewelry craftsmanship, he had the strength which the

king would not refuse.

Yet, the king has not given him any chance to be involved.

It is as if Roland Wimbledon did not plan to make money by selling gemstones.

This made Victor a bit distressed.

He also tried to sell the jewelry in Neverwinter and the result was equally terrible. The jewelry, which commonly cost dozens of gold royals, were not affordable for civilians. It was always sold to wealthy noble families so that they could show off and compare them at the banquets. However, there are not any nobles in Neverwinter!

That is right; in such a huge new city, he could not find anyone who was interested in jewelry, which was something completely unforeseen by him.

He had come to Neverwinter several times, but he only purchased goods instead of selling. So the bills on the sheepskin notebook showed a huge trade deficit.

This was undoubtedly an unhealthy signal.

The emergence of the train made Victor realize that the future arrived but not everywhere. To better expand his business, he naturally had to go to the place which was nearest to the future. The shift of business focus from the old king's city to the new one was an inevitable choice for him.

The question was what he should do if there was no such industry in the future.

He was not short of money. Even if he did nothing, he could enjoy a prosperous life. However, he must prove his ability in trade so that those businessmen who coveted his family and "Black Money" would have nothing to say.

He can not let his father down.

When Victor was thinking about how to solve this problem, the noise downstairs suddenly exploded, and even the floor shook slightly.

It is still early, so there should not be a crowd of people drinking downstairs. What happened?

He pulled the string of the brass bell to summon a maid.

"Excuse me," a pretty woman quickly opened the door and walked in. "Can I help you, Sir?"

At the moment the door was open, the noise became louder. There appeared to be someone reading aloud.

Victor pointed outside and asked, "What're they doing downstairs?"

"I'm sorry, Sir. Have they bothered you?" The maid smiled apologetically. "Please forgive them. After all, it's the release day of the newspaper. They're jostling to buy it."

"News... paper?" he repeated awkwardly.

"Yes, His Majesty made the announcement a week ago. The newspaper is used to replace the bulletin board on the square. Everyone has been looking forward to it for a long time. We're eager to see what the newspaper is."

"Oh, a new product? No wonder it's the new king's city." It immediately aroused Victor's interest. He asked, "How much is it?"

"I heard that it costs ten bronze royals for each."

"Buy one... no, 10 for me!" he said immediately.

"Yes." The maid trod downstairs and returned quickly, panting. "Sir, sir... The newspapers delivered have all been sold out."

"So fast?" Victor blinked in surprise. If it were a commodity, it would be too popular. However, this was also alright for him, as he could get it as long as he paid with more money. "Then buy it from people who have bought it. No matter how expensive!"

He threw a gold royal to the maid and said, "As long as you can get it, all that's left is yours!"

"Yes, Sir!" The girl replied with a huge grin.

About seven minutes later, six piles of newspaper in gray color were handed to him.

"The price has risen to 20 silver royals. I have done my best..." the maid said hesitatively.

So they raised the price as they found out that he was eager to buy it. The maid's expression clearly exposed her thoughts. Though she failed the task, she was unwilling to return the remaining money. Victor did not care about it and asked, "What's your name?"

"Tinkle, Sir."

"Keep the change," he said, waving the newspaper in his hand. "By the way, would you like to read this with me?"

Since he already had delicious food and wine, what was missing was naturally self-evident. Her heaving breasts and beads of sweat on her nose tip all gave off a breath of youthful vitality. Having met too many noble ladies, he felt this slightly clumsy girl had a certain, different flavor, not to mention that she was a resident of Neverwinter and could answer his questions when needed.

"Sir..." The maid lowered her head and a pale blush appeared on her cheeks. After a while, she bit her lip and nodded before she whispered, "I'd like to."

"Hahaha," he laughed and patted the soft couch. "Then thank you very much for your company."

Chapter 1021: Graycastle Weekly

The moment she sat on the couch, the padding immediately creaked and bent.

"It seems that I have to remind the tavern to reinforce the couch," thought Victor, "Though the bed is right in the corner of the room, sometimes it more interesting to not do it in bed. A new place brings unexpected feelings. Compared with the king's city in the Kingdom of Dawn, the tavern here obviously lacks a profound background."

Before long, Tinkle cleaned the drinks and food on the table and spread the newspapers out in front of him.

"This is..." Victor couldn't help raising his eyebrows. He saw small, dense words on the paper, just like the classics which his family treasured.

He used to think that he had seen the most precious of things in the world and even played with them with his hands. Usually, when a commodity was placed in front of him, he could immediately determine its price. However, it was the first time that he was hesitated to make a judgment about something.

Such neat and delicate words were unlikely to be hand-written. In other words, they were probably printed. Considering the cost of printing, it was generally only used for important and rarely modified archives and classics, for example, the Royal Code.

That was where the problem lied. In order to achieve the best printing effect, the best possible materials would be used for printing such great quality books. The lambskin, which had never been shaved, would be considered as the basic material, and it was not unusual to decorate the page with golden lines and jewelry so as to emphasize extraordinary luxury and to ensure adequate durability.

But the newspaper was different. It was obviously made of rough papyrus, which would melt in water. It had neither a cover nor any protective measures at its corners. Even if he read it carefully, it would start to fall apart after a few reads. In his eyes, it was like putting a precious gemstone in an iron ingot.

Victor recalled what the maid said before. The king intended to use this thing to replace the public announcement board. Did that mean that it would be printed with new content in the future?

He got a positive answer from her.

"Yeah, the announcement said the newspaper would be issued every two weeks, and the amount would increase to ensure most people could read it."

It only costs ten bronze royals for each.

He began to wonder how much wealth had been plundered by King Roland from Hermes. Why would he continue doing this stuff which was doomed to lose money?

The jewelry trader, who previously believed that there might be a business opportunity, gave up his idea immediately.

"Who cares", Victor whispered secretly. "It's not my money anyway, and it's none of my business whether the king earns or loses. I'll focus on the newspaper."

Thinking of that, he moved his eyes to the first page.

On the top was an enlarged, bold title: "Graycastle Weekly".

Below it, a full-page was about the king's enthronement, as well as the news that the Kingdom of Dawn and Graycastle signed a pact against the demons.

He had heard of them before, but he did not know the details.

After reading a few lines, Victor was completely immersed himself in it.

He held his breath while reading it.

For the first time, he read the details of these two events from the perspective of the high officials. It was different from the rumors that spread among the public populace, the reports on the newspapers included accurate times, places, reasoning, process and results. It even demonstrated their causes, especially for the pact with the Kingdom of Dawn. The treachery of the Moya family, the rebellion of the nobles, and the letter for help which came from 1000 kilometers away. All of these factors led to the expedition of the Graycastle army. Then it was a matter, of course, that the new King of Dawn was willing to restore the kingdom's order with the help of Roland Wimbledon.

He knew these descriptions were definitely not authentic, but he still subconsciously wanted to believe them. The content was so complete and logically sound that it was difficult not to believe.

In fact, since they dared to put such things on the table directly, it was already convincing enough.

Victor ignored the presence of Tinkle for a time and could not wait to keep reading.

The second page was related to the demons. The writer wrote a detailed daily record of a battle which narrated the expedition of the First Army to the western wilds and its attack on the demons.

This was the first time he had heard of it.

When Victor last came to Neverwinter, he heard that the Devilbeasts had attacked the border. He had never expected the king to initiate revenge for it. Not only did the First Army march into the forbidden land, which was full of danger, it gave its opponents a heavy blow. This made them no longer dare to show up in the Western Region. If what was reported was true, it could almost be described as a legendary event!

"How did they do it?" was the first thing to pop into Victor's mind.

Whether it was the half-a-month raids over 1,000 kilometers

away or the life-and-death confrontation that was merely 10 kilometers away, it was breath-taking.

When reading the army gathering in formation and resisting waves of enemies falling from the sky, he even felt chills down his spine.

As he had been exposed to "Black Money" since he was a child, he was more informed than most that the world was not as simple as people imagined. In the invisible darkness, there were many powers that did not tire. Therefore, he was not surprised by the emergence of the demons when he heard it in the Kingdom of Dawn. He guessed that the leaders of those Chambers of Commerce were probably of the same mind.

But nothing more.

The nobles and businessmen of the Kingdom of Dawn still focused on their own interests, and not care about the Battle of Divine Will, which was a mere term in their eyes.

Victor never expected that Graycastle had already had a direct confrontation with the demons and had won. This aroused an indescribable feeling in his heart.

He couldn't explain what it was, but it made him feel safe and happy.

This should have nothing to do with him.

After thinking about it, he was probably affected by the word "human" the most, which had appeared many times in the newspaper.

For a moment, Victor felt as if he was standing with the First Army of Graycastle. In front of powerful and terrible enemies, the gap between family and blood seemed to have faded away.

He took a deep breath and licked his slightly dry lips before reading the third page.

The content on this page was much more casual. It was about the trivial things that happened in Neverwinter with quite novel titles such as "Shock! What's Behind the Explosion in the City Last Night? Detective Group Reveals the Secret!", "Water Pipe Cracked, Roads Become Skating Tracks!", "Bird Beak Mushrooms Recipe Every Neverwinteror Should Know", etc...

Victor glanced through the page, and when he turned it over, he was stunned.

A black and white picture occupied half of the page. It was so vivid that it was difficult for him to turn his eyes away.

Two girls, holding hands, stood together peacefully on a snow-covered land. White snow flew in the air, forming a gorgeous scenery. Below the picture was a beautiful line of words.

"An art beyond the times, the gift of His Majesty's enthronement! 'The Wolf Princess', performed by the Star Flower Troupe and the Witches, and written by His Majesty will be staged at the end of this month! Book your tickets now!"

Chapter 1022: Divergence

"What's this?" Victor pointed at the picture and asked, "A new play?"

Twinkle leaned over and looked at the newspaper, "No, sir... This picture should be of the magic movie."

"Magic movie?" It was another term which he had never heard of. It was so fantastic to be living in the future. The jewelry tradesman was eagerly asked, "Can you explain it in detail?"

The maid answered a bit embarrassed, "Well... I don't know too much. The same picture was hung up several days ago in Central Square, but it was colored. I heard the magic movie is a brand-new performance and is only available on a special stage."

"An art... beyond the times. Since he dares to use such words to describe it, the King of Graycastle must be extremely confident about it." Victor rubbed the slightly rough paper and thought, "It seems that this is worth looking forward to."

He noticed that there were a few lines under the titles, which indicated the time and location of the performance and the way to purchase tickets.

Victor's heart jumped at the words.

Wait... The ticket costs 40 gold royals?

How could that be possible? It surpassed the price of the top troupe in the City of Glow!

He could afford this price, but would there be anyone else in the city willing to pay for a magic movie since they didn't even care for jewelry?

No, there was still more... Victor frowned and continued to read. At the same time, he could not help murmuring, "Residents with Neverwinter ID card can get a special discount and a book ticket

for 25 silver royals. Note: Tickets purchased at non-discounted prices offers a better viewing experience and reserved seating. Please order now. Tickets purchased at the discounted price do not include food and drinks; outside food and drink is not allowed. Please plan accordingly."

These were really... two totally different prices!

He had seen products with two prices, but never with such a drastic difference. In addition, most of these deals were conducted in private instead of being publicly advertised; otherwise, people who paid more would complain and it might be the last purchase from them. He was shocked by this!

Not only was it directly written in the newspaper, it also added many restrictions. It seemed that people had to rush to get it even if they were willing to pay the higher price.

However, he found that he was one of them...

He had to admit, this selling tactic did have a strange kind of attraction. Those who could afford 40 gold royals must be wealthy merchants or nobles. Admission was a proof of his strength, not to mention he was full of curiosity about the magic movie.

Victor jumped off the soft couch and put on his wolfskin coat.

"Sir?" Twinkle whispered. She was extremely surprised, as she had taken off her clothes and put on a thin veil. She was lying in bed, waiting for Victor to join her. She was unsure of how to respond to this sudden change.

Victor picked up her clothes and threw them to her. "Where can I buy tickets to the magic movie? Take me there, now!"

The filming of "The Wolf Princess" had entered the final phase.

The final battle of Princess Royal against the demon lord would start in the palace. Roland had emptied the first floor of the castle

to make room for the filming.

May, the Star of the Western Region, was currently in charge of the movie. In order for the new drama the best it could be, she even quit acting and devoted herself to directing the film.

"Cut!" May called out when Lorgar kicked in the castle door and rushed into the hall. "Very good. Let's call it a day. Thank you all for your hard work."

"Oh."

"Thank you, master," the crew chorused.

If it were her in the past, she would definitely roll her eyes toward them; however, now she just smiled and nodded.

"This is probably a change brought on by time," May thought.

She really had changed a lot since coming to Neverwinter.

"Mind the broken wood," Carter Lannis, who was standing by, immediately approached. "Should I help you around it?"

"Everyone is watching us. I can walk by myself," May replied, slightly embarrassed. Her husband had a good disposition, but he did not act as a stoic knight. She had no idea why His Majesty would choose him as the Chief Knight.

"Then at least let me walk in front of you," Carter stepped over and swept out a path for her with his feet.

His tall figure immediately obscured the sunshine coming in from the courtyard.

May couldn't help smiling.

However, she knew that she must hide her smile from him. Otherwise, he would be too proud and excited.

"Are you ready for your scene tomorrow? Don't forget the lines when Miss Lorgar hits you."

Speaking of the movie, Carter bitterly said, "Can you please ask

her to be a little gentler? During the scene in the snowfield last time, I almost threw up. After she transforms into a wolf, she's nearly as strong as Ashes. Their strength is monstrous."

"Don't you know? Actors should adapt to the play, but not the opposite. Not to mention the magic movie is more realistic than a play." May said, smiling, "So the solution is very simple. Don't eat too much before filming your scene tomorrow."

The Chief Knight did not know whether to laugh or cry. He shook his head and changed a topic, "By the way, guess who I met at the pier today?"

"Well... your old lover?" May shrugged.

"As if!" Carter hurriedly turned around and said, "It was Kajen Fels."

May stopped moving and asked, "Really?"

"Of course, he's a celebrity in King's City. I can't be mistaken." Noticing the change in her eyes, he grinned, "A lot of people got off the ship with him. I guess they're his troupe members. Other people also recognized Sir Kajen and it nearly caused a traffic jam in the pier area. How about it? Is this news worth a kiss?"

"Yes!" May said, without hesitation. "I want to pay him a visit!"

Kajen Fels, his name was almost synonymous with theater. Since he took to the stage, he had dazzled audiences for over 30 years. From the Southern Territory to the Northern Region, any actor who wanted to reach the top one could not avoid being compared with him. Since he was over 50 years old, he no longer performed the stage. He still worked behind the scenes and was a masterful playwright. He still held great influence in the theater.

When May went to King's City, it was in the play "Memoir of a Prince's Search for Love" written by him, that she stood on stage in front of royalty for the first time. Without Kajen Fels's guidance and praise, she would never have become famous so quickly nor be

known as the Star of the Western Region.

"I knew you would say that," Carter handed her a note. "I've already checked what hotel he's staying at. I have to supervise the craftsmen who are replacing the door, so I won't be able to accompany you."

"Thank you!" May took the note with joy, "It doesn't matter. I can go with people from the troupe—" Then she looked at the members who were still arranging set pieces and props, and called out to them, "Irene, Tina, Rosia, Gait, Swallow! Come here!"

That's right; Master Kajen must have come for Roland's coronation. When King Wimbledon III was crowned, it was Kajin's continuous performance that pushed the ceremony to the climax. Even if he did not perform on stage anymore, his troupe remained the most outstanding one in Graycastle. In the troupe, for example, Roentgen and Egrepo... were genius performers of different styles. If Irene and other actors could get some lessons or advise from them, it would certainly be a great help for their careers!

As she expected, when they heard that they were going to visit Kajen Fels, they could not help cheering loudly. Gait even stammered excitedly, "Can, can we really meet Sir Kajen?"

"It shouldn't be a problem," May said, shrugging. "But you guys have to work harder in the future so as not to waste this opportunity."

"Yes! I'll definitely work harder and harder!" Tina replied, her eyes lighting up.

"Let's go."

They first stopped at the Convenience Market and bought some gifts. Then they went to the hotel where Master Kajen was staying —the Whistle Inn.

A crowd of people who had heard of the news gathered on the

hotel's lobby. Seeing May, they moved out of the way. Apparently, they were all fans of the Star Flower Troupe.

Some people even took out paper and pen and seemed to be prepared to record the first encounter between the two troupes. They undoubtedly were reporters from the Ministry of Public Relations and Communications.

However, to May's surprise, the receptionist returned with a cold face soon after coming back downstairs.

"I'm sorry. Sir Kajen has never heard of the Star Flower Troupe and doesn't want to meet you, either. Please leave."

Chapter 1023: Divergent

For a moment, the noisy tavern fell into silence, and even the patrons seated at the bar counter stopped drinking and turned to look at them.

May was a little shocked. "When I was in the old king's city, I once sought guidance—"

"From Kajen, right? That's exactly why he won't see you." The manager lowered his voice. "Lord Kajen is very disappointed in you, Miss May."

Even though the voice was very quiet, the girls next to May could easily catch every word. May felt her hand be suddenly squeezed by Irene.

Those words struck them harder than any accusation would, especially when it came from a distinguished dramatist. It was fine for him to criticize or encourage his juniors for their sakes, but it was harsh to tell his juniors that they were disappointments. She would be completely discombobulated or even sob on the spot if she heard those words three years ago.

But she didn't think of herself first anymore.

After so many years as the Star of the Western Region, she, the backbone of the Star Flower Troupe, was confident about her acting ability. If the blame had hurt her so much, what about Irene, Tina, and the other members of the troupe? Not to mention Swallow, such a talented girl who only lacked confidence.

Therefore, May found herself unexpectedly calm at the moment.

May let out a soft breath, composed herself, and replied, "Really? I believe there must be a mistake. It'll be better if I'm allowed to explain it to him personally, but if not I can only give him my apologies."

This took the manager by surprise, for he had never expected she

would accept it so mildly. He frowned. "You..."

"Anyway, I hope that Mr. Kajen makes more progress in drama and makes a breakthrough in the ceremony. We'll take our leave." She turned and walked towards the door, and then spoke over her shoulder, "By the way, please don't call me Miss May. I'm Mrs. Lannis now."

The weather was still the same on their way back, but May felt like the sky looked more gloomy. No one spoke a word. The joy and excitement they had when they started from their home was all gone.

It was not until they were about to go home separately that Gait asked, "Lady May, did you really fall out with Master Kajen?"

"Idiot. What nonsense!" Rosia shot him a stern glance. "How could Sister May pay a visit to him if they had grudges against each other? That's no better than asking to be ignored! How could he say that he was disappointed in her? I reckon he's jealous."

Everyone gasped and looked at Rosia in disbelief.

"Hey... the man you're talking about is the great dramatist of Graycastle."

Rosia argued indignantly, "I mean, now that Neverwinter has become the new capital and Star Flower is more popular than any other troupes in the Western Region, they're not as appreciated as they used to be. Naturally, they wouldn't be friendly to us. I've been with May since she moved from Longsong to Border Town. She has stopped contacting Kajen Troupe ever since she returned from the old king's city, so their claim that she has disappointed Master Kajen is illogical. To put it plainly, they look down upon us just because of our short history and little reputation among the nobles."

"Is that so?" Irene said, seeming to be enlightened.

Perhaps because of Rosia's bold and confident argument,

everyone cheered up a little bit.

"I wondered why the manager was afraid to look Lady May in the eyes. Now it appears that he felt guilty..."

"So, is that the reason why Master Kajen didn't want to see Sister May?"

"Of course not." May could not help rolling her eyes. "How could he, such a famed master, be jealous of me? Almost no one has ever heard of me outside the Western Region, but his name has spread across the entirety Graycastle, and even people in some regions of the Kingdom of Dawn have heard of him. What you're saying is far too wrong."

Everyone cringed at those words.

"Anyway, that's the end of it. Do you understand?" May said and clapped her hands. "Go home, all of you. We have a tight schedule of shooting tomorrow."

That night, Carter asked her about the visit over dinner.

She just ran through the thing with him.

Somehow, May did not want her husband to be involved.

After all, this was just a row in the drama circle.

The shooting ran smoothly over the next few days. May had been concerned that everyone would be frustrated by their encounter with the Kajen Troupe, but, on the contrary, in the final act of the movie that was shot in the palace, all of them seemed to have called upon their strength and contributed an extraordinarily brilliant performance. Even Gait performed better than usual and he also insisted on finishing every action perfectly before he took a rest. The passion had not only motivated the entire Star Flower Troupe but also become a revelation to the new members.

Those newcomers, who did not participate in that visit, guessed it was Master Kajen's guidance that stimulated their seniors to

work so hard.

May was slightly relieved.

It seemed that the incident did not have much of an impact on the troupe.

She would have thought that the dust had settled, but something unexpected happened again.

The manager of Kajen Troupe visited her at the end of the day when they had just finished the shooting.

"My lord wanted to see you, Miss May... no, Mrs. Lannis." The man seemed to have been waiting for a long time outside the Castle District as his hat was covered with a thin layer of snow.

Of course, his lord was Kajen Fels, the great dramatist, who had founded the Kajen Troupe.

May was so confused and even wanted to tell him that she would not come with him, since she had been such a disappointment to Kajen Fels, but she found that she did want to see Kajen... for an explanation for his words.

"Can my companions come with me?" May asked.

"No, Lord Kajen only permit you to visit him." The man shook his head.

"May..." Irene sounded concerned.

She gave Irene a comforting glance, and then took a deep breath before she answered. "I see. Please lead the way."

...

Here she was, at the same place once again, Whistling Hotel.

May, following the manager, took the stairs up to the second floor and entered a large study, where she saw some familiar friends standing against the bookcase. "Princess" Roentgen, "Minstrel" Egrepo, "Flying Cloud" Bernis... all of them were top-

level performers coming from all over the country. She once worked with them rather well in the "Memoir of a Prince's Search for Love". They should have been happy to see her again after so many years apart, but May could only sense contempt and hostility from their cold faces.

This was something she did not expect.

May had not have looked forward to any warm welcome from these people, but she did not understand why they made their dislike of her so obvious, for, as far as she was concerned, actors would never show their actual feeling to the other actors, even those who they did not get along with. For famous actors, hiding their actual feelings was no more than a cinch, so very few of them would turn against other people openly, even against new actors. Unlike the troublemakers in the Longsong Theatre, the actors would be more cautious as their reputation grew. However, now even they refused to hide any feelings in front of her.

May turned her eyes on the old gray-haired man seated behind the desk. Kajen seemed to have aged a lot in the past few years, but no one within the room would ignore him. They all kept quiet and waited for him to begin.

Kajen, seeming to sense her gaze, closed the script in his hands and stood up.

What he was about to say, however, completely stunned her.

"Mrs. Lannis, can you please stop your troupe's next show?"

Chapter 1024: The Dispute over Ideas (I)

"Stop the show? But they have finished shooting the magic movie, and they don't have to perform on stage... No, that's not the point. The question is why he would make such a request."

For a moment, May was completely lost, for she had never expected to hear this from Kajen.

Perhaps sensing that his words were a little abrupt, Kajen added quickly, "I don't mean for you to cancel it, just shelve it temporarily. Make some excuse, such as illness or the need to take some rest. If you postpone the show for about a week, I figure that the officials will allow me to see the king."

"But..." May wanted to argue that the magic movie was totally different from the traditional dramas and the Star Flower Troupe did not need to be responsible for screening it. However, as soon as the "but" was said out, Roentgen broke into a sneer.

It seemed that Roentgen had been holding back her urge to argue for a long time.

"I've told you that it's a waste of effort. How could she stop the show that she has been working on? Master, you've asked the wrong person."

"I thought that you were just led astray and gave up your quest for drama, but I didn't expect you to become so vile," Bernis said regretfully, stamping her feet. "I've spoken up for you on that day... Mrs. Lannis, what do you take drama as? A way to earn your fame?"

"Even If she didn't tell us, we should have known about what she really is, the wife of Chief Knight Carter Lannis. So, it does make sense to see the officials try to please her. Otherwise, I don't believe that King Roland would not even grant Master Kajen, such a famed dramatist, a chance to perform for him."

"Enough!" Kajen Fels snapped, "I don't invite her here for you all to argue with! And I'm sure that May didn't do that. If you don't trust my judgment, please take your leave. Right now, I just want to hear her answer."

"Oh, my God." May was astonished when she finally realized what was going on. "Kajen Troupe wants to perform for His Majesty for his enthronement and has submitted the application in the City Hall in accordance with the rules, but contrary to their expectation, they were rejected. That's why they blame me after they knew that I have married with Chief Knight, thinking that it must be me who made the officials lay aside their application and give them the cold shoulder."

What a big misunderstanding!

If that was the case, then she could understand why they showed open animosity towards her.

In the drama circle, actors had to experience a lot of things, such as rejection, criticism, or the competition for a new role. All of these things happened among actors, so no actor would openly argue for their misfortune. However, if anyone of them used their contacts to hinder other people's performance, that would be regarded as an offense to the actors who loved acting.

She would be more resentful and contemptuous if such things were put on her.

May said slowly, "I didn't talk to anyone about the incident in the hotel except the companions who were with me. I can promise you that."

"I trust you too. That's why I decided to have a talk with you," Kajen said, rubbing his brow. "We've known nothing about this new city, nor have we understood why we were rejected. To ask you stop the show is the last thing I want to do, but I have no choice. Of course, we'll compensate you for your loss afterward."

The other actors frowned and looked away when they heard the word "compensate".

May, meanwhile, did not bother to guess what he would compensate her, for she had known Kajen Fels well enough to understand that he must have had his reasons.

"I'd like to ask you a question before I give you my answer." She pondered for a moment and said, "Your manager told me that I've disappointed you... Why?"

The old man was silent for a long while, and then he waved to the other actors.

"Master..." Roentgen wanted to say something, but she held her words back at the last moment and then walked out of the room.

One after another, they followed her out, leaving May and Kajen alone.

Kajen Fels stared at May, his eyes full of reproach that almost made her retreat.

"How many dramas have you played in the past two years?"

That was a question she did not expect to hear.

"Um... seven or eight?" May was not sure.

"Twelve, actually," Kajen said, counting with his fingers. "'Cinderella', 'The Witches' Story', 'Dawn', 'New City'... Let's lay aside the quality of the scripts. Do you really think you've played them well?"

May was shocked. "Have you seen... them all?"

"No, that's a stupid question." She realized it right after she blurted the question out. Most of her dramas were played in the Western Region, so he must have heard of them from other people.

As she had expected, Kajen shook his head. "I have students in the four regions of Graycastle, from whom I can easily hear of these dramas." He sighed. "But did it not take you as long as eight

months to prepare for the 'Memoir of a Prince's Search for Love'?"

May was speechless, for she had seen behind the old man's words.

It was a law widely acknowledged in the drama circle that a vivid and successful performance was based on tons of preparation. No matter how talented the actors were, they could not be sure that they had memorized every line and every action in a short period of time.

In truth, as there were so many dramas to rehearse, she had made quite a few simple mistakes that she had never made before, such as saying the wrong lines and making the wrong expressions, which might not be noticed by ordinary people but would be particularly abrupt to a knowledgeable audience.

"I don't know why you moved from the Longsong Theatre to Border Town, where you began to perform the dramas of this level," Kajen said seriously. "You might do it under your lord's order, but he wouldn't force you to do it if it was against your will. After all, a play is like an open dance, and no one can dance well when they're shackled." "May," he said. His tone had changed. Instead of addressing her as Mrs. Lannis, he sounded like a teacher teaching his beloved student. "You should've known very well that the audience also helps to improve your acting skill. How could you improve without their high demands and standards stimulating you? It's true that you've pleased most people, but you gave up your aspiration to be a superb actor, and that's why I'm disappointed in you."

May was quiet. She could not even find any words to argue, as she knew that he was telling the truth. In terms of performance, she had indeed become worse recently. She had slashed a lot of her private practice time and also declined her role in the "Wolf Princess". The dramas were arranged in such a tight schedule that it was unlikely for her to have enough time to study every role she was about to play. In addition, maintaining the Star Flower Troupe

had also taken a lot of her energy.

It took her a long while to find something to say. "Have you spent a long time preparing for this drama that you're about to play?" she asked.

"It took me two years," Kajen said proudly. "Apart from the time we spent performing the old plays, we've been rehearsing it all the time, even on the boat and in this hotel. By now, we've polished every detail and all we need is a stage where my students can present their perfect work. I must say that it's better than the 'Memoir of a Prince's Search for Love' I performed when I was at the zenith of my fame."

He looked right at May and continued, "Although you've misused the talent God has gifted you, I believe your love for the drama is real. You must be very happy to watch an authentic drama too. Am I right?"

Chapter 1025: The Dispute over Ideas (II)

He was right.

May could tell that Kajen Fels did not change. At least, he still stuck to his pure faith in dramas, the exact faith that made him so frank to her and still stick to his opinion even though he was asking for her help.

In Kajen's opinion, someone who sincerely loved drama was sure to make room for a perfect play.

But she found that she could not easily answer "yes".

Something had stopped her.

May closed her eyes, the girl's voice coming back to her ears.

"Mrs. Lannis, please wait..."

"This is a little token of my gratitude. Please do accept it..."

Then a salted fish was handed over to her.

At that moment, May understood what was stopping her.

She opened her eyes and held the Master Dramatist's gaze.

This time, she would not evade the issue anymore.

There was so much rhetoric she could put in her answer to make it sound both polite and pleasant. First, she could compliment him, and then she might use the "but" to explain the fact that the magic movie was utterly different from the ordinary dramas and was made under an imperial order.

Kajen Fels knew almost nothing about Neverwinter, nor did he have any idea of the peculiarity of Star Flower Troupe and how much His Majesty had valued those dramas she had played. He had made a mistake from the very beginning. If she could make him understand how wrong he was, it might be a good time to clear up any misapprehensions between them and even change Kajen's bad

impression of her.

But May knew in her heart that it was just another kind of evading.

"Mr. Kajen, have you prepared the show only for His Majesty?"

"And the nobles, ministers, and lords who will participate in the ceremony," Kajen said, nodding. "A show will lose its meaning without the matching audience, no matter how wonderful it is."

Like gold matching with jewels and fine wine with exquisite cups, only the careful and attentive audience could understand the very meaning of the actors' every expression and action and appreciate the true perfection of the play.

That was true.

"Then I'm sorry that I can't promise you," May said seriously, "because your drama will by no means be perfect."

"Wha-what?" The old man frowned. "What makes you say so? You haven't seen it."

"Because the audience will just enjoy the show however wonderful it is," May said and she felt the strength upwelling from the bottom of her heart. "They'll applaud, praise, and talk about it perhaps when they're enjoying their afternoon tea. But that's all. The play is just one of numerous entertainments, and their life will be just the same whether they see it or not. How could you call a thing perfect if it's dispensable to people?"

Kajen Fels scowled. For a creator, his drama was like a child to him and he would never accept such a remark easily. "I thought your pursuit of fame has blinded you, but I didn't expect that kind of arrogance from you. So, are you telling me that you've seen a perfect drama?"

"I haven't," May said frankly. "But I know what it should be like."

Kajen looked into her eyes, his gaze sharp as knives. Years of

experience had given him an imposing aura of authority, which was intimidating to every junior in the drama circle.

He was obviously waiting for her explanation, but May knew that no answer would please him.

She did not retreat.

There was no doubt that what she was about to say would result in her parting most of her fellows in the drama circle and taking a path that none of them had ever seen nor could understand. By then, the criticism on her would be much worse or even lead to breaking off all the relationships between her and those people.

She was going to pay a high price, wasn't she?

She asked herself.

There was a voice answering her.

But it's worth fighting for.

May answered, "A great drama shouldn't be something just for people to enjoy or an entertainment that the nobles would seek only when they're free. It deserves more than that. Sometimes it can even change people's fate."

"'The Witch Diaries' helped people to understand what a witch is so that the witches could clear the stigma they didn't deserve. 'Dawn' encouraged people to work and get rid of poverty and hunger so that many people could start a much better life. 'New City' intuitively showed the new migrants how to comply with the rules of Neverwinter, and rooted out the Rats that had hidden in them. 'The Hero's Life'..."

She paused and said slowly, "helped a sad girl to get back on her feet and start a new life. I know that there are many people who lost their families in the war. I'm very glad that my drama could give them help, no matter how many people could benefit from it."

"What exactly are you trying to say?" Kajen asked grimly.

"You told me that the most excellent drama was able to let the watchers identify with what the character had experienced in their life, but I want more. I want my drama to help the audience see their own future," May said honestly. "The nobles could always find alternatives to the jewels and exquisite cups if they lack them, while my drama is the food that can feed up a lot of people."

For the first time, her words reduced Kajen to silence.

"I have no doubt that your drama will be very exciting after two years of preparation, but I'm also confident that the upcoming 'Wolf Princess' will be equally mind-blowing. We only spent more than a month on rehearsal and some of us haven't even acted before, but, still, it'll be the best drama I've ever seen." May curtsied and went on, "If you still hold to your original opinion about our drama after you watch it, then I'll recommend your new play to His Majesty for you."

May felt much better after she had left the Whistling Hotel, to the point even her steps became springy.

Just as she stepped out of the alley, she saw Carter Lannis waiting on the street.

"Why are you here?" May was surprised.

"Irene told me that you left with Mr. Kajen's man. I'm a little worried." Carter shrugged. "After all, I'm going to stop by the Convenience Market to buy some food for dinner."

"Really?" May glanced at him. "Have you already known what had happened at the hotel that day?"

"You ate less that night. It was obvious to me." Chief Knight said proudly.

"Hang on..." She stopped abruptly. "Did you ask City Hall to reject Kajen Troupe's application for his performance?"

"Ah?" Carter raised his eyebrow. "What are you talking about? Whose application for performance did I reject?"

Mey stared at him for a moment before she let out a sigh of relief.
"No, nothing..."

"Hey, are you hiding something from me again?"

"It's not important anyway..." She laughed. "You haven't bought the ingredients for dinner, have you?"

"No, what would you like to eat?"

"Um, how about salted fish?"

"Salted fish? I remember you don't like pickled food... It took you many days to finish the fish that the little girl gave to you last time."

"I like it now. What? Do you have an opinion?" May interrupted him and then reached out her right hand to him. "Do you want to come with me or not?"

"Of course." The Knight took her hand without hesitation.
"Anything you want."

...

Chapter 1026: Staging of a New Play

At last, the release date of The Wolf Princess was finally here.

As soon as sunlight began to shine through the window, Victor was awakened by a rustling sound. He opened his eyes only to discover that the other side of the pillow had been vacated, leaving behind only a few long strands of hair and the faint body scent of a young woman.

"Tinkle?" He called out in a slightly dry voice.

"Your Excellency, you're awake?" The person who replied seemed somewhat alarmed. "Was it my being too noisy that disturbed you?"

The jewel merchant sat up and leaned back on the headboard while revealing a slight smile.

The maid was still fumbling with her attire. She looked particularly adorable with only half of her dress worn on as yet, completely exposing her smooth back and only half-concealing her chest.

"Your Excellency... can you stop looking at me like that?" Tinkle asked somewhat embarrassedly.

"This is the kind of feeling that those noble young ladies can never offer." Victor began to chuckle. "Alrighttt... I shan't look anymore. But, I should let you know that you won't be able to put it on properly without assistance."

"Oh..." The latter seemed a little perplexed.

"Come over and I'll help you." He reached out a hand. "But let me have a cup of water first, I'm so thirsty."

... ...

After helping her to tie up the laces, Victor placed his hand on the maid's waist. "Done. It suits you pretty well. The dress may seem

flimsy, but before elastic bands were invented, the servants who were chosen to dress the young ladies had to be big and burly or they wouldn't be able to fasten it properly."

"I see." The young girl stuck out her tongue. "This is the first time I've heard..."

"Many items used by nobles are like that. They look good but are terribly troublesome to use. In short, flashy without substance." He laughed. "Hmm, can't wait to wear it out today, can you?"

"No no... I woke up early just to finish preparation earlier so that I won't hold up your journey..." Tinkle shook her hand. "I shall now go fetch water for you to clean up and also prepare breakfast."

"Wearing this to perform such tasks?" Victor glanced at the visibly-excited maid but decided not to dig deeper. "Okay, go. I just need a fresh omelet toast, and don't forget to make yourself a serving."

"Yes, thank you, Your Excellency." She bowed respectfully before making her way out. "Thanks also for the gift of clothing... and the chance to watch the play."

As the door shut, Victor climbed off the bed and poured a glass of red wine for himself.

"This is another plus of this type of girl - that they show immense gratitude for the simplest of benefaction. Had I gifted the same things to a noble young lady, I mightn't even get a smiling face as a sign of appreciation."

80 gold royals were nothing much to him after all. It was naturally a lot more enjoyable to watch a play together with someone else instead of alone. This was simply a matter of self-interest and had little to do with kindness or adoration.

He was curious about only one thing - how exciting could a magic movie that costs 40 gold royals per ticket be?

... ...

"Teacher, are you really going?" Roentgen peered worriedly at the neatly-dressed Kajen Fels. "May might've said that she would recommend your new play to His Highness, but that could just be a pretense. If she's simply taking advantage of your fame, you'll be falling into her trap by going."

"I feel the same way... she's no longer trustworthy," Egrepo grumbled. "I doubt she can even meet His Highness easily, let alone recommend a play to him."

"But May's husband is, after all, the Chief Knight. Even if she doesn't get to see him, she should be able to pass a message, right?" Bernis added cautiously.

"Speaking up for her yet again?" Roentgen glowered at her. "Don't forget about how she treated us!"

"Uh... didn't Teacher say that she hasn't meddled with the City Hall?"

"Who knows if she's lying or not..."

"Enough!" Kajen snapped. "My intention for going was never because of this supposed recommendation. She may be conceited and all, but we cannot behave like this. I have to take a look even if I don't agree with her." He humped before continuing, "Can a brood of play fledglings really act out the story perfectly? It takes some nerve to say so! If I don't see it for myself, it'll mean that I've already been frightened by her words. Only by seeing it will I be able to burst her bubble, no?"

He then slapped four finely-printed tickets down on the table. "So, what she has sent aren't admission tickets, but letters of challenge! Whether to go or not will be left up to each of you. But remember, those who don't watch the play shouldn't make uninformed criticisms. For those who accept the challenge, follow me."

....

The entrance to the new theater was already brimming with chatter by 10 o'clock in the morning.

Everyone appeared to be in high anticipation of the play which had been long publicized. There were also people present who could not afford the steep prices of the premiere but hoped to catch a glimpse by hook or by crook.

However, these people discovered, to their surprise, that the theater was designed completely different from the others. There was not a single window, and its entire architecture resembled an inverted bowl. It was impossible to hear a sound from inside by planting one's face against the walls, let alone peek through. The volume of the theater was extremely "small and exquisite", approximating only a quarter the size of a central square, less than 15 meters in length and height, and only one story high. Together with the undecorated and gray cement exterior, it was hard to believe that an avant-garde play was about to be staged here.

Victor walked together with Tinkle into the theater while harboring these sorts of suspicions.

Many checkpoints were set up along the single-person walkways, which Victor was only allowed to pass after he had turned in the God's Stone of Retaliation and self-defense dagger he was carrying.

The duo's eyes lit up the moment they pushed open the doors.

"Wow..." Tinkle exclaimed uncontrollably.

Victor was also surprised. The theater was actually illuminated by magic stones!

He had, before this, only seen such valuable things in Black Money.

It was telling of the owner's wealth that he could display these stones in a public place.

Unlike the austerity of the exterior, the theater's interior was as extravagant as could be. Four clusters of Stones of Lightning hung

from the arched dome, from where they illuminated the windowless hall. Warm air could be felt gushing out from the floor to maintain the temperature of the hall at a comfortable level. Rows of deck chairs were placed around the center at an arm's length away from each other. As a result, the hall appeared to be extra spacious, and did not feel cramped in any way.

Victor was beginning to understand that this was the probable reason why tickets were expensive. Though the spacious room offered a comfortable viewing experience, this meant that seats were extremely limited. Judging from the number of seats, a single play could only accommodate between 50 to 80 people. This figure was significantly less than that of a typical performance elsewhere. Hence, if ticket prices were not increased, it would not be possible to break even.

But there was another important question.

As he looked around the hall, he could not make out where the stage was.

Apart from a sturdy stone pillar which was erected in the center of the hall and connected directly to the ceiling, there was nothing else but seats. There was no space set aside for the performance.

Unless the Star Flower Troupe danced around the pillar?

Chapter 1027: An Absurd Viewing Experience (Part I)

Suppressing his doubts, Victor followed the seat number on his ticket and sat down at Row 3 No. 10.

"You're that guy from the Lothar family..." someone beside him suddenly exclaimed.

Somewhat surprised, he turned his head towards the voice and discovered that the latter was an elegantly-dressed woman. Unlike Tinkle, she was obviously seasoned in courtship and romance, and could exhibit her most enchanting side at any time. "Victor Lothar. You are?"

"Long heard the name." The woman placed a hand on her chest and smiled. "I'm Denise Payton from the City of Glow. "

"I see, a young lady from the Payton family," Victor replied. "Never thought I would see a merchant from my city in a foreign land."

"Neither did I imagine meeting a legendary businessman here." She then pointed to someone beside her. "Let me introduce you to His Excellency Yorko, who previously served as the Kingdom of Dawn's messenger. It was he who invited me."

"Nice to meet you."

More pleasantries followed.

While chatting with Yorko, Victor also got to acquaint with a few elites from Graycastle.

As he had expected, the people attending the premiere were all extremely wealthy and noble. For example, the front row consisted of powerholders from the City Hall. Based on Yorko's explanation, their tickets were gifted to them by His Majesty, and hence they did not fork out a single royal. The middle and back rows consisted

instead of wealthy merchants and guests. He even saw, among the audience, figures from King City's troupe.

The price of 40 gold royals had thus served to turn the theater into a mini banquet of notables. If he could build up connections with these people, the price would certainly have been worth it.

When all attendees had arrived, a dozen or so cart-pushing servants entered the hall through a different entrance and placed weird-looking paper packets in the holders next to each chair.

"Is this meant for us?" Tinkle lifted and examined the packet curiously. "Eh, the word written here is p... "popcorn"?"

"There're also french fries and milk - are these all for eating?" Victor noticed that the packet that was labelled "milk" seemed rather peculiar. It looked like a parchment but felt incomparably soft. For a moment, he was unsure of how it was supposed to be opened. Fortunately, a demonstrative illustration was drawn beneath the label. That many guests had never used a packet like this had, inductably, been taken into consideration.

Following the steps in the illustration, he inserted a transparent straw in the seal at the top of the packet. As he sucked up the milk, he felt an indescribable sense of achievement pouring forth from his heart.

This is way too amazing!

Even the milk, which he would usually find too bland for his liking, tasted sweeter than ever before.

This owed very much to the packet's thoughtful illustration and exquisite design, which were unprecedented. Even if it contained plain water, it would still have sold for a good price!

The person who designed it is surely an outstanding merchant.

Victor also noticed that the design was not simply for novelty's sake. Unlike traditional porcelain and glassware, which came with edges and corners, these two types of packets were not prone to

causing injury. This advantage is even more significant after considering the statuses of the guests. Furthermore, the packets fitted perfectly in the holders even if unsealed, and thus there was no worry of spillage.

It was hard to imagine how a perfect fit like this was possible, given that the packets were a brand-new invention.

Just as Victor intended to try out the taste of the popcorn, an ethereal voice was heard in the hall. "A warm welcome to the magic movie theater of Graycastle. The Wolf Princess is about to begin. May everyone kindly return to their seats and listen carefully to the rules which should be observed. If there're any problems during the screening, please act in accordance with the rules in order to prevent accidents from occurring."

There was a brief commotion inside the hall. This was because everyone heard the voice but could not tell where it was coming from.

"First of all, the magic movie's duration is 2 hours and 15 minutes, throughout which there'll be no break. You're not allowed to leave your seat on your own. If you require assistance, simply pull on the string of the bell located under your seat and wait."

"Secondly, this will be an unprecedented viewing experience. Please don't panic no matter what happens, and remember that it's only a very special kind of play, instead of a real event. You'll be held accountable by the Neverwinter Police Department for any harm or loss you cause to a third party."

Victor could not help laughing softly as he heard this. "Whoa, is there really anyone left on Earth who can mistake a play for reality? It's verging on self-praise to use the word 'panic'." He deftly turned his body and took a quick glance behind. As he expected, the guests who were also in the film industry had heavily sarcastic looks on their faces.

However, Tinkle did not seem to feel that the words were any inappropriate. She clutched nervously onto the armrest of her chair.

As if to give the audience some time to digest, the voice only resumed after a rather long pause. "May everyone please enjoy this dreamy moment in time."

"The show shall now begin."

As the words fell, the four clusters of Stones of Lightning gradually ascended and disappeared into the dome, causing the hall to dim temporarily.

"Where's this going? As the widespread popularity of open-air theaters shows, adequate lighting, or its lack thereof, is crucial to the overall effect of the play. How are we to appreciate the details of the play if there isn't any light?" Victor gaped his mouth a little wider. He was increasingly intrigued as to how the play would end up when the introduction was already this mysterious.

However, before he could contain his amusement, he was completely stunned by what happened in the next instant.

A beam of white light flashed by, before turning everything pitch black. This was the blackest black he had ever seen, as if he was now in a deep abyss. He could not even see the chair he was sitting on, let alone his surroundings. The only relief was that he could still feel his butt sitting on the chair, or he probably would have leaped up in horror.

But even more inconceivable things were to follow. Victor noticed that his body had also disappeared into the darkness completely. He could not see his hands if he placed them right in front of his face. He was not able to tell if this was because it was truly too dark, or because he had been robbed of his vision.

The unrest in the hall showed that he was not the only one who was startled. The intermittent screaming and crying made the

atmosphere tense.

It turned out that "panic" was not just empty talk.

Had it not been for that warning, there would probably be chaos in the hall by this time.

Just then, a gentle ray of light glimmered from overhead and dispelled the darkness. The hall was once again lit - but instead of calming down, the audience gasped in unison.

"My goodness." Victor's eyes widened. "What's... going on?" The scene in front him was no longer within the theater, and instead had moved into the sky!

He could hear cold wind blowing beside his ears, and could clearly see snowflakes drifting in the sky. There was nothing beneath his feet; he was a few kilometers off the earth, from where the mountains and jungles appeared to be patches of gray and white, just like the doodles of young children. This experience, the like of which he never had before, caused his body to tremble. He clung as tightly as he could on to the armrest and shrunk his body on to the "invisible" chair which now bore his weight vitally, as if one little mistake would cause him to fall through the sky and turn to dust.

"Our story begins in the capital of a mountainous province in the far north, where two lively and adorable princesses reside..." It was only when he heard this assuring and composed voice that he discerned that he was still watching a play, and had not been projected into the heavens.

"Is there really anyone left on Earth who can mistake a play for reality?"

Victor cried tearlessly. "Who would have imagined that this is what magic movies are like?"

In the next two hours and more, the jewel merchant had the most incredible time of his life.

Chapter 1028: An Unusual Theatre Experience (II)

The audience didn't divert their attention from the breathtaking shots as the camera shifted its focus from the sky to the earth.

In fact, the sudden influx of the images made the movie even more fascinating. Victor was overwhelmed by the bustling marketplace and the splendid inner palace in the movie. He fought his urge to stand up and touch the throne, as he didn't want to cause any unintended loss to "the third party",

The audience in the hall sucked in their breaths. Words had completely abandoned them. Every now and then, they uttered short cries of surprise.

They were awestruck by every single change in the scene.

They gave an involuntary exclamation at the first appearance of the princess.

They cried out as the princess transformed into a wolf when she turned 14.

They yelled when the foreign prince visited the country.

When they saw the princess lose control of her power and destroy the palace, the entire hall was stirred.

Completely different from a traditional theatre where the audience was supposed to keep quiet and stay calm, the "movie theatre" exploded with interjections.

Victor knew this had nothing to do with the audience's manner. They simply couldn't contain themselves. The viewers, on one hand, enjoyed the new theatre experience and feared what would happen next on the other. They had no way to channel their emotions but to produce various odd sounds. Only in this way would they know that they weren't dreaming and that somebody

was with them witnessing the wonder!

Roland would probably categorize the audience's reactions as another type of "bullet screens".

While the audience was shouting, the princess transformed herself into a giant wolf and departed for the snow land. When she leaped over his head, Victor felt all his hair stand on its end. He almost wanted to bolt out from the room.

However, a beautiful song calmed him down.

All his uneasiness dissolved into a multitude of feelings: sadness, bitterness, relief, and determination. Victor felt his eyes filling!

At that moment, he seemed to understand the princess. He felt sorrowful for her being wronged but also proud of her bravery.

The scene changed with the flow of the sweet melody and the storyline of the film. Victor was deeply moved by the tune. Looking back on his own experience, he found resonance in the song.

Who had not been wronged or misunderstood before?

Yet most people choose to remain silent!

Victor was not afraid of the wolf girl anymore. He applauded her decision to leave!

Victor seemed to see past the wolf girl to himself, who had also left his native town.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the music was a stroke of genius. It did not steal the focus but was instead in perfect harmony with the movie.

From the loud applause of the audience, he knew the song had moved everybody in the hall. The whole room suddenly erupted into a deafening cheer at this moment.

In a split second, Victor had already formed his opinion on the movie.

Roland's advertisement was not exaggerating at all.

It was definitely a masterpiece ahead of its time!

...

He lost.

The moment the song rang, Kajen knew he had lost to May. It was not about his personal failure. In fact, "The Wolf Princess" defeated his new play in every aspect.

Plays were essentially a form of entertainment.

At first, Kajen had been dumbstruck by the film and wondered how Roland could possibly achieve this. Soon, he became numb to the constant shock. The magic movie simply blew him away. All his knowledge about acting accumulated over the past decades seemed to become incredibly absurd.

The audience in the theatre actually had quite high expectations of new plays. Although they were not as picky as nobles, they did know the difference between a good play and a bad one. In other words, it was hard to fool them. Yet, when watching the new movie, everybody was now flabberghasted like an ignorant and uncivilized country bumpkin.

Kajen did not blame them.

It actually took him a great deal of self-control to maintain his silence as well.

Meanwhile, Kajen knew his new play could definitely not arouse the audience like the magic movie did.

Everybody would think "The Wolf Princess" was undoubtedly much better than his play.

Did they not notice the acting mistakes in the movie?

Of course they did.

Nonetheless, the movie was so good that they could simply

overlook those little mistakes.

Kajen knew the amount of information a man could receive within a period of time was limited. As the audience was overwhelmed by the story and images, a few small errors would barely divert their attention.

So was this an unfair competition?

Kajen did not think so.

He knew the development of theatrical plays better than anybody else.

The reason why famous actors and actresses always favored big theatres was that big theatres were financially more capable of providing better costumes, equipment, and settings.

These elements were also the key to the success of a play.

In fact, the success of Kajen's teacher was largely attributed to the usage of large stage backdrops in his plays. Kajen's teacher reached a pinnacle in his career when he had invented a removable wooden house. Ever since then, all other troupes had followed his example. The removable wooden house had thus become a staple in every play. Without good equipment or costumes, no actor or actress could give an excellent performance.

The more lifelike and detailed the setting was, the better theatrical effect.

Star Flower Troupe simply perfected their theatrical scenery.

Kajen felt relieved after he came to this conclusion.

He leaned back on the soft recliner and breathed out a deep sigh.

Finally, he could focus on the brilliant movie.

...

The story was drawing to its end.

The candles were rekindled, and people could once again see the

chairs and the stone pillars as the light was restored.

However, not a single person left. Everybody was still savoring the aftertaste of the story, revolving the bitter battle between the wolf prince and the demon lord in their heads.

Kajen Fels was the first to applaud.

The applause jerked the audience out of the trance. Soon, more people joined, and the waves of thunderous applause swept over the entire theater.

"Mr. Kajen..."

Looking at the applauding Kajen, Roetgen and Egrepo almost burst into tears. Bennis' eyes were glistening.

"Don't cry." The old actor's eyes also reddened, although he did not know what he was sad about. These actors and actresses had spent years perfecting their acting skills, but now all their hard work had been for nothing. Nobody who had experienced the new film would ever want to watch traditional plays again. The utter defeat was devastating, but Kajen knew he could not give up. "None of your work is going to be wasted!" said he firmly.

"Mr. Kajen, what do you mean..."

"What's the biggest downside of a play? It's the distance!" Kajen said tremulously. "The distance between the stage and the audience makes it impossible to capture every single change in the actors' expressions, but the magic movie has solved this problem. I'm sure in the future, acting skills will become even more important. Probably one day, just a perfect smile would grab your audience's attention. So, our failure is just temporary. It doesn't mean your hard work has amounted to nothing!"

Kajen paused for a second and then continued, "Don't worry. I assure you that we'll come back once we figure out the mechanism behind the magic movie. We'll soon return to compete with Star Flower Troupe. By that time, people would see for themselves.

Now, dry your eyes and stand upright. The movie deserved an applause."

In the tumultuous applause, "The Wolf Princess" soon became the most renowned film in the whole city of Neverwinter.

Chapter 1029: A Person Back Home

Roland had foreseen that the movie would create quite a buzz among the mass.

In fact, he, as the producer and first viewer of the movie, had also been shocked by the epoch-making film when he had watched it in the castle hall on the night of its completion.

Words had completely failed him. The visual impact of the virtual world was phenomenal.

Roland realized that he had not been so impressed when watching the recordings of the meetings and ceremonies through the Sigil back in Reflection Church in the old Holy City. As most of the recordings were static images, they were not as lifelike as motion pictures, although Roland had to admit they were quite interesting. However, once the images were animated, human brains would be easily deceived, making people believe what they saw was real, even though they knew very well that it was not the case. The best example was the scene of a falling object in the movie.

Even Roland was quite amazed at the movie himself, let alone the general public, whose sole entertainment in this world so far had only been theatrical plays.

The success of the movie was almost certain.

However, there was also something beyond Roland's expectations.

The visual impact of the movie seemed to go beyond what audience could physically bear.

When the movie had been on show for the third and the fifth time, one viewer had panicked out and attempted to leave the theater, whereas another had passed out in the middle of the show. The former almost trampled over other viewers while the latter

had been sent to the hospital immediately. Had Nana not been there, the unfortunate incident might have ended in tragedy.

Both incidents had occurred when Echo had started singing.

Apparently, the bird's eye view shot at the beginning and the transformation of the princess posed some safety hazards.

The movie was currently targetting wealthy audience only, so the viewers should be more open to new things than ordinary civilians. Roland projected that when the movie was introduced to the mass a week later, there would probably be more incidents like this.

Due to safety concerns, Roland had no choice but to make some adjustments to the movie theatre.

Initially, he had planned to replace the recliners with benches to accommodate more people and prohibited food and drinks in the theater. However, it now appeared that benches were not a good option because they would be easily tipped over when a stampede occurred. In the end, Roland decided to use iron benches fastened to the ground and require audience to wear seat belts all time during the show to prevent similar accidents.

Additionally, he imposed some restrictions on audience's age and their health conditions. Anyone who was over 45, had a heart disease or acrophobia was not allowed to watch "The Wolf Princess".

Since it was Roland's first time to manage a theater, everything from designing the venue to drafting theater rules and regulations was new to him.

As "The Wolf Princess" became the most popular show in Neverwinter, the movie also attracted many businesses.

Over the past few days, the city hall had received a dozen applications from various merchants, all of whom had expressed their desires to open franchises for selling popcorns and milk bags.

However, after hearing Barov's report, Roland turned all of the requests down.

The business of snacks such as popcorns was not very lucrative after all. For one thing, the product was hard to preserve but easy to make, so people could easily steal the related technologies. For another, corn was not the main agricultural crop in Neverwinter, so Roland did not have much competitiveness in the market. As such, he would rather keep the business to himself for tourism purposes.

As for the milk bags, he had no excess to sell at all.

They were indeed the first product made from the rubber worms.

These worms had pretty much settled down in the Third Border City after one year of adapting. The ancient witches had achieved great progress in their research. After they had found that they could adjust the flexibility of the rubber by changing the ratio of the slimes and the gall of the worm, they had soon settled where their research should head.

The rubber business had thus become a side project for the Taquila survivors. They dedicated themselves to the production of various rubber samples and the testing of the rubber's durability and corrosion resistance ability.

The milk bag and the straw were two products they invented.

Roland did not decide to manufacture these two items on a whim. They actually played a significant role in the logistics. The rubber bag could be used to carry food and disinfectants. Compared to metal or glass containers, rubber bags were much cheaper. Other than worms, the production practically cost nothing.

Although there were a number of worm holes in the Third Border City, with the number of rubber worms increasing from 100 to nearly 1,000, it was still not enough to meet the war requirement. Therefore, the rubber worms would be one of the

most important strategic resources in Neverwinter for a very long time.

...

Four days after the release of the movie, Roland learned that Edith, the Pearl of the Northern Region, had returned to Neverwinter with Olivia.

He met the girl whom he had just met once in the castle parlor.

Olivia looked pretty nervous. She did not avert her eyes, but there was almost a Spartan despair hidden underneath her serenity.

Unlike their last encounter, this time, Roland could see her face clearly in the well-lit hall. Her soft facial features and the emaciated frame reminded him of a flower that had just overcome a storm. After a long trip, she looked even more drained and fragile, but she managed to sit upright, which, at the same time, made her look even more beautiful. Roland knew if she had fallen into the hands of some other lords, she would have either been well protected or completely destroyed.

It seemed that she was ready to accept whatever came her way.

Roland broke into a smile. He knew many nobles in this era lived a life of debauchery, but he was not that type of person.

"Don't worry," Roland comforted her. "It's much warmer than Coldwind Ridge here. Nobody will disturb you. You'll soon fall in love with this city."

"Yes... Your Majesty," Olivia said quietly. She hesitated for a moment and lowered her head.

"Take a rest first. Somebody will take you to your room," Roland replied.

After the guard led Olivia out, Edith dipped in a curtsy and asked, "That's all? I thought you would have a chat with her to get

familiar with each other."

"You have covered everything. I have nothing to add," Roland said while shrugging. Ignoring the latter half of Edith's statement, he asked, "How was your trip?"

"Pretty good. She quickly made the decision for the sake of her child," Edith replied. "The clean-up took a bit longer than we anticipated, but those people would not cause you trouble anymore."

"Good job," said Roland with a nod. "It was the right choice to put this matter in your hands."

"I'm flattered." The Pearl of the Northern Region said, smiling. "By the way, there's another thing I want to tell you. On our way back, I received a message from the combat engineer unit. Azima didn't find 'the Glory of the Sun' in the Eastern Region, so she has turned to the north."

Roland frowned at the news. "So... the extension line is from the other side of the Swirling Sea?" he wondered. If the mine was outside of Graycastle, it would be a little problematic.

"I see." Roland soon regained his composure and said, "You should also go take a rest now."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

When Edith was about to leave, she suddenly turned around and said, "Your Majesty, it's time for you to go to sleep as well. You must take care of yourself."

"Huh?" Roland looked at her in surprise.

"Because this world would be a lot less interesting without you," Edith replied with a smile and then disappeared from his sight.

Chapter 1030: The Coronation Ceremony

"She was... way over the board," said Nightingale grumpily as she revealed herself from the Mist. "What did she mean by that?"

Roland also noticed the subtle change in the attitude of the Pearl of the Northern Region after he told her about how Iron Axe had dealt with the nobles. He had a vague feeling that Edith became completely honest with him, which was actually not a bad thing.

"Well..." Roland thought for a while and asked, "Are you able to tell whether she's lying or not?"

"She was telling the truth," Nightingale replied while twitching her mouth. "She did mean what she said. Otherwise, I would have stopped her and got to the bottom of it."

"Well, in that case, let it go." Roland smiled. "I have neither strength nor time to guess what everybody's thinking about."

Nightingale instantly stopped her complaining after hearing these words. She jerked her head away indifferently and said, "You, you're right... You just need to focus on one or two people and that will do."

It took Roland a great effort to suppress his laughter. He twitched his lips, amused at how bad Nightingale was at concealing her own thoughts. Roland cleared his throat and said, "Then let's go back to the office. I have a lot of work to do."

He has to test out the two newly developed internal combustion engines and figure out how to use them to achieve mass production. Also, he needs to design the parts and other supplementary mechanical equipment. Furthermore, he has to work on the design and the assembly of the armored trains, the manufacture of the biological rubber, as well as the expansion of the plants and the armies.

However, there was one thing that outweighed all of these tasks.

Although it was just a matter of formality, it played a significant role in bringing the people together.

The moment Olivia arrived in Neverwinter, Roland knew it was time for him to officially ascend the throne.

...

A week later, the Castle District of Neverwinter was open to the public for the first time. Under the guidance of the police and guards, thousands of civilians, who had gone through a screening process, gathered around in the yard, waiting for the coronation in excitement. The streets festooned with streamers and lights beyond the Castle District were swarmed with people. Apparently, people's enthusiasm was not quenched by the snow.

The Lord's castle was also temporarily altered due to the upcoming ceremony.

The wall of the front yard had been torn down and replaced with fences so that people could see what was going on inside. All the facilities in the yard had been removed, and new patches of grass had been laid. The audience would have a full view of the whole ceremony once they walked up the slope of the Castle District.

Each side of the castle was decorated with a red banner hemmed with black that dropped down from the roof and stretched across the whole building. The bright color of the banner stood out in the vast whiteness, adding a note of solemnity and grandeur to this shabby castle.

The biggest change was on the second floor of the castle.

A balcony facing the gate of the front yard protruded from the second floor. No doubt, the king was going to receive blessings from his subjects here after the coronation.

Only the designer of the balcony, Minister Carl, knew that the temporary alteration had been completed by the witches. Ms. Agatha had first created an ice wall, to which Ms. Soraya applied a

"brick coating", making it look like a part of the castle.

In such cold weather, the thick ice wall would last for several days.

...

On the other hand, people inside the castle were busy with the preparation work.

"Your Majesty, are you ready?" Wendy's voice popped up outside the bedroom. "All the ministers and guests are now here waiting for you."

"Got it. Just give me one moment," Roland replied. He turned around to the girl in a white dress and asked, "Are you ready?"

"Wait a minute... I'm still a bit nervous." The girl was no one else but Anna. She peered down at the crowd below through the curtain, apparently unnerved by the frenzy down there. "Are you sure you want me to come with you? The ceremonial officer told me no king has done it before."

Roland realized that Anna was not as fearless as he thought. Although she was smiling, she was still worried and lost upon such a big event. Her confidence came from her outstanding academic performance and her desire for new knowledge. When she is dedicated to her work, she is a true genius. Despite her talent, she is essentially a girl in her twenties, born and brought up on the countryside.

Anna is certainly not accustomed to presenting herself in front of thousands of people.

Roland smiled and said softly, "Then I'll set a precedent. Or do you want me to crown myself?"

"No, of course not." Anna shook her head. "I'm just..."

Roland walked up to her, wrapped his arms around her and said, "In that case, I'll put it in another way."

"Another... way?"

"Yes." Roland took a deep breath and asked in a very serious tone, "Miss Anna, I would like to hire you as my wife. Will you accept my offer?"

"Haha." Anna burst into laughter. "No, I'm no longer a prisoner. Also..."

"Also what?"

"It's on such a short notice." She pounded Roland's shoulder with her little fist, then reached out her gloved right hand and said, "Thank you, Roland. Let's go."

Roland grasped her hand tightly and replied, "As you command."

...

The couple pushed the door open, walked across the hallway, down the stairs, and into the hall on the ground floor.

The hall instantly fell silent. People automatically made way for the pair while bowing their heads.

Roland glanced at the Neverwinter witches on his left side as he proceeded. He saw Tilly, Ashes, Nightingale, Wendy, Lightning and Agatha... Completely different from what they had looked like three years ago, they blended into the society and became an inseparable part of the kingdom.

On his right side stood the city hall officials and local officers, including Barov, Edith, Iron Axe, Carl, Kyle, Theo, Yorko and so on. They formed the governmental bodies in the Kingdom of Graycastle. Through the years, they have elevated themselves from common people to the prominent political figures.

The coronation should have been a very complicated procedure. However, since the witches and the officials of Neverwinter had all acknowledged Roland's sovereignty, the process was considerably simplified.

Roland led Anna to the center of the hall, where stood a stone table with two golden crowns on it.

As both King Wimbledon III and the Church of Hermes were gone, Roland dismissed the request of the ceremonial officer to administer the coronation, insisting that the king and the queen should crown each other.

It was the first time in the history of Graycastle to crown a king and a queen at the same time.

The ceremonial officer was certainly opposed to Roland's suggestion, but to no avail. Surprisingly, Barov sided with Roland this time.

Roland bent down and allowed Anna to crown him, and then he gently placed the other crown on her head.

When the pair turned around, everybody knelt down.

"Long live our king!"

In the cheers of the crowd, Roland and Anna walked to the platform at the other end of the room, out of the domed hall onto the balcony.

There was an eruption of noises below!

Without waiting for him to raise his hand to wave, a deafening cheer flooded over him.

"Long live King Roland!"

"Long live the king!"

"Long live the City of Neverwinter!"

The cheers were earth-shattering. The crowd was flooded with euphoria as the king ascended the throne. Streamers and petals drifted down from the balcony and swirled in the cold wind. For a moment, nobody seemed to care about the flurries of snow anymore.

Just as the city bell tolled, the cannons at the encampment of the First Army also produced thunderous roars at a distance. There, on the border of the Barbarian Land and the Western Region, rose the new King of Graycastle.

Chapter 1031: The King of Graycastle (I)

Meanwhile...

In the City of Glow

Hearing the noon bell ring, Horford Quinn put down his quill and looked toward the southwestern.

The news of the coronation of Prince Roland had not only spread throughout the whole of Graycastle, but also to the Kingdom of Dawn. According to the flyers distributed on the streets, this should be the very moment the young man was crowned.

Everything was happening so fast.

Horford found it hard to believe that the new king was several years younger than his daughter Andrea. Roland had now secured his throne and even extended his influence to the neighboring country.

After the war against the Moya Family, the name of Roland Wimbledon was known by every noble in the king's city of the Kingdom of Dawn. In the beginning, the rumors about this extraordinary prince were just circulated among some underground Chambers of Commerce, but news of him soon spread throughout his country like wildfire.

Three years ago, Prince Roland had just been the insignificant lord of a remote town. Nobody in the Wimbledon Family had thought he would become the sovereign of the state in the end.

His sudden rise was shrouded in mystery. A lot of his behavior was as unpredictable and bizarre as his unprecedeted ascendancy. The coronation ceremony, for example, perfectly illustrated the eccentricity in King Roland's character. He was probably the only king in history who chose to hold the ceremony in the Months of Demons.

Kings with such unique characters typically emerged when the

country was in a state of chaos or experiencing a civil strife. With the looming Battle of Divine Will, Horford felt that the world would soon undergo drastic changes.

"Your Majesty," The guard said, breaking his train of thought. "A letter from Sir Hill Fawkes."

"Really?" His eyes were back on his desk again. "Open it and read it to me."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

The word "Your Majesty" was indeed hypnotic. For the past 20 years, he had been the Hand of the King and had spoken those words countless times. Horford had thought he would be immune to the pleasant intoxication brought on by the sudden surge of power and prestige, but the truth was his heart swelled with pride every time somebody addressed him in this way.

Regardless, he should congratulate the new King of Graycastle.

Horford knew very well that his ascendancy to the throne was due to Roland's support. It was not Sir Quinn's swords those big nobles feared, but the deafening thunder that could raze the whole city that Roland commanded. That was why his authority had yet to be challenged. Horford knew the best way to secure his grip on power was to form an alliance with Graycastle, particularly at this moment when everything was about to change.

"The letter says that Graycastle has sent a mining expedition to the border of our country. They're expecting your assistance and support."

"Inform Earl Luoxi of this matter and tell him to greet the expedition with the knightage," Horford instructed immediately. "Also, inform all the local lords in that region and make sure the expedition gets what they need."

"As you command, Your Majesty!"

...

Archduke Island, off the coast of the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

Although the town was far outside the range of influence of the Months of Demons, the wet, cold sea breeze made the whole town look desolate and grim. Few people could be found on the muddy streets, except in the dock area.

Despite the weather, an open air bar next to a warehouse drew a lot of attention. The bar offered cheap wines to sailors and travelers who want to warm up a little. Most of the customers simply came and left, but now there were around 100 people gathered about the bar.

A woman wearing clothes made of coarse fabrics also approached the crowd.

"Farrina?" Someone whispered. "What are you dwelling on? We should go."

"Demons," she replied.

"What?" The latter's expression changed.

"I heard somebody talking about the demons." The woman called Farrina said. "Just a moment, Joe."

The man hesitated. At length, he lowered his head and said in a hushed voice, "Yes... Your Holiness."

"This isn't an order." Farrina waved her hand and inched closer, hoping to hear more of the conversation.

"I've never seen such gruesome monsters. They had wings wider than a man and tusks bigger than our arms. City walls are nothing to them!" A merchant boasted. Now the center of attention for the surrounding people, he spoke even louder, "But that isn't the worst of it. There's another type of demon who looks like a man, but much stronger. Their spears are faster and deadlier than a balista. Armor is useless against them! I don't mind if you laugh at me, but I almost peed my pants when I saw them."

People in the crowd gasped.

"Is it true? Are they invulnerable?"

"We couldn't lay a finger on them if they are flying in the sky."

Still, some people looked incredulous.

"Get over with yourself! What demons — Do you even know the difference between demonic beasts and demons?"

"Go to Hermes Plateau and take a look! There are all kinds of monsters there. You seem to wet your pants easily. Don't freeze your dick off.

"What do you know about it?!" The merchant cried indignantly. "That's how Prince Roland Wimbledon described them! He's been living in the Western Region for many years, and he doesn't know the difference between demonic beasts and demons? Rubbish! Demonic beasts are just dumb, roving mobs, but demons have well-trained armies. Have you ever seen animals coordinate attacks on a city, one after another?"

"If what you said is true, how did Graycastle drive them off?"

"You wouldn't be able to understand. The situation was precarious, but suddenly thunder roared up from the city wall and pierced the sky." The merchant bragged, spraying his audience with spit. "The demons were instantly blasted to smithereens. Their blood splattered all over the ground. One of them fell right in front of the hotel I was staying at. There was a hole as big as a bowl in its chest. God knows how they did this!"

"Even ballista couldn't do that. Based on what you said, isn't the prince a God?"

"Haha. If he's not, how do you think he wiped out the church?"

Hearing these words, Farrina's hands curled into fists.

"..." Joe put his hand on Farrina's shoulder and shook his head in silence.

"I know." Farrina took a deep breath and unclenched her fists. "What do you think?"

"The Bloody Moon has not appeared yet. The demons shouldn't have arrived at the Barbarian Lands. But his story fits the descriptions of the demons in the Holy Book. It doesn't sound like a lie. I don't... really know." Joe paused for a while and said, "But we have nothing..."

"Nothing to do with them." Farrina cut in. "You're right, Joe. We have to take care of ourselves first."

After the death of the acting Pope, Tucker Thor, Farrina had followed his orders, retreating from New Holy City along with the rest of the Judgement Army. She had planned to re-establish the church on Archduke Island in the Kingdom of Wolfheart where the witch organization, the Bloodfang Association, used to be. To prevent the resurgence of the witches, they had selected this fertile land as their new stronghold.

Yet to their great surprise, the news of the fall of Hermes had spread throughout the whole region. After learning the fall of Hermes, the bishop on Archduke Island had turned against the church and colluded with the nobles. Now, he was known as the Earl of Archduke Island. To secure his new title, he had even hanged the messengers from the church outside the city gate.

The unexpected betrayal was a heavy blow to the Judgement Army. Because of this, many of them had left the Judgement Army. Farrina had been living a clandestine life on Archduke Island for half a year and achieved nothing yet. If she could not re-establish the church and attract new believers, this would probably be the end of the church.

Without a doubt, the only way to save the church from this precarious situation was to execute the traitor as a deterrent.

The only problem was that the enemy also had a group of God's Punishment Warriors.

It was going to be a bitter fight.

"Let's get out of here." Farrina pulled up her hood and cast a last glance at the bar.

The merchant rambled on. "There are a lot of interesting things there! For example, black iron ships as huge as hills, and a giant building taller than Tower of Babel. Once you see them, you'll never forget!"

"C'mon, tell us everything. I'll buy you another drink!"

"Were they all built by that Prince Roland?"

"Of course! But you can't call him His Highness anymore. By the time I left Neverwinter, he had decided to ascend the throne! The date... let me see, right... it's today!"

"Wow. So now he's the King of Graycastle?"

"Haha, that's right!" The merchant raised his wineglass and said, "Since it's his coronation day, let's make a toast. To the King of Graycastle!"

"To the King of Graycastle!" The crowd raised their glasses.

"The King of... Graycastle?" Farrina sneered. "Be whatever king you like. The Battle of Divine Will would eventually reduce the whole world to ashes. We'll sooner or later meet again in the Hell. The only problem is who'll go there first. If I fail to defeat the traitor, I'll be there before you; If I win, then I'll wait for the news of your fall right here."

"King Roland Wimbledon," thought Farrina savagely.

Chapter 1032: The King of Graycastle (II)

At the headstream of Silver Stream located in the Southernmost Region of the Sand Sea.

Brian sat in a tent, waiting for news from the front to arrive. Sitting opposite to him was the chief of the Wildflame clan, Guelz Burnflame, and the elder of the Osha Clan, Thuram.

The two men had become the representatives of the Mojin Clan.

Together with the commander of the Gun Battalion who represented the chief, all the leaders who participated in the decision-making process with respect to the Sand Nations were here.

The cold desert wind whistled outside the tent, but the interior of the tent was quite warm as if it were sitting on the top of a giant brazier. No matter how cold the ground seemed to be, every time Brian buried his feet into the sand, he could feel heat escape from underneath. It was even warmer than the brick beds and the heating system used in Neverwinter.

The locals invented this so-called "sand bed", which was a shallow hole as wide as a man in the ground. Native people would first replace the coarse sand with sifted fine sand, and then bury themselves in it to keep their body temperatures. The fine sand had a soft touch and was even softer than burlap mattresses. With just a tent and a sand bed, the Sand Nations could spend their winter very comfortably.

Sadly, it was also the same terrestrial heat that destroyed the life here. As seawater gradually evaporated, the desert within 100 miles was wiped out by seasalts. Hardly any sandworms or scorpions lurked around, let alone trees and flowers.

Without an oasis, there would be no food. The entire plain was thus a bleak emptiness. Perhaps, nowhere in the whole

Southermost Region could be more dismal and dead than here except Blackwater Swamp.

For the past hundred years, Mojins had erected several wooden houses here and there in this saline-alkali land to provide accommodations for traveling salt merchants. However, things had now changed.

"You don't seem to be worried at all, young man." Guelz ended the silence. "The Wildwave Clan and the Cut Bone Clan were two biggest clans in Iron Sand City. The chief can easily crush them, but this doesn't mean those small tribes can do that too. Do you really put so much faith in them?"

As Guelz spoke out, Thuram also said, "In the past one year, not a single tribe in Iron Sand City has been promoted to be one of the six big clans. Apparently, Wildwave and Cut Bone have kept all the resources to themselves. With sufficient food, a clan in the Southernmost Region can easily recover from a previous loss. They're now probably stronger than prior to you coming here."

"Faith? No..." Brian slowly shook his head. "I don't put faith in them."

"Then... why didn't you request troops from the chief?" Thuram asked in surprise. "100 soldiers and the warriors from the Wildflame Clan and the Osha Clan would be more than enough to deter those brutes from setting foot on the small oasis again."

"Then what? The First Army would be permanently stationed in Silver Stream Oasis protecting those small tribes?" Brian stared at him. "Do you think His Majesty wants a future like this?"

"Um, well..." Thuram was at a loss for words.

Shortly after the relocation, they had started exploiting the resources in the Southernmost Region. Apart from building the Festive Harbor at Endless Cape, another key project was the development of the saline-alkali land at the headstream of Silver

Stream. Since there was no river, they had to rely on manpower and animal power to transfer those salts out of the desert, to the closest branch of Redwater River by cart.

For this reason, Fallen Dragon Ridge and Port of Clearwater had provided competitive wages and benefits to the laborers, in hopes of attracting more Sand Nations to help with the transfer.

Within a year, various tents had been pitched in the saline-alkali land, and the place was soon alive with busy workers.

The laborers dug wells and drew consumable water from the underground stream of Silver Stream. They not only drank the water but also used it to filter salt.

Shortly afterwards, plants were built. Without steam engines or other machinery, they did all the work manually. The whole working process was similar to gold mining. People separated the scattered salt from the sand and gravel, collected and crystalized them before shipping them to the inner land of the Western Region where they would be further processed. The repetitive and tedious work gradually became a new mundane routine of everyday life in the saline-alkali land.

Although there was no oasis, sandworms or scorpions around this area, the place started to get teeming with life.

Many relocaters, as well as some small tribes who had been hesitating to come simply could not resist the good compensation. They came to the border in groups and offered to work for the project in exchange for wheat, dried meat and fabrics. Some of them returned to the oasis with the food while others stayed, becoming one of the earliest settlers.

The big clans in Iron City were not happy about this. The more tribes that chose to move out of the oasis, the fewer resources they would obtain. The increasing tension between the big clans and the small tribes had finally turned into an open conflict two months ago, where the Wildwave and Cut Bone Clans had

dispatched infantry and killed some tribesmen departing the oasis. They had left their heads on the road leading to the north, apparently to deter people from the Sand Nations from leaving.

The big clans did not have the courage to openly provoke King of Graycastle, so they had attacked the small tribes who had yet to submit to his rule. They had thought the chief would dismiss the matter, for no northern king would actually care about the lives of hundreds of Sand Nations. They had not expected, however, that this would be the very thing that Roland detested.

Brian knew very well that King Roland dreaded any loss of the population for no reason.

Before Guelz had sent his letter to Neverwinter, Brian had already prepared himself for a probable war.

"What if they lose?" said Guelz Burnflame as he massaged his forehead apprehensively. "If I remember correctly, those people received training on how to use a flintlock just three months ago, right?"

"Then we'll be slaughtered, and your clansmen would be reduced to slaves in Iron Sand City," said Brian as he closed his eyes. "Prior to the war, I told you that it's going to be your battle, not mine. I've provided you with weapons. If you still can't save your clansmen from their swords, you don't deserve the honor of being one of the soldiers of Graycastle. I can always train new people if I want."

"..." Guelz's manner tightened abruptly into a grave expression for the first time as if he was re-evaluating the young officer in front of him.

"Plus, you forgot that the training three months ago was only for flintlocks." Brian went on, "Apart from flintlocks, they also use swords, daggers, their fists and teeth. These are weapons Sand Nations have been using from the moment they were born, aren't they?"

The members of the Sand Nation troop selected by Brian were all from the small tribes that had relocated to Port of Clearwater. Unlike the big clans such as Wildflame, those tribes were still concerned about the tribes left behind at the oasis, even though they had chosen to live at Graycastle. As these people were not politically involved but still maintained a relationship with the desert, they were perfect for forming a local military power. They used old, outdated flintlocks as their weapons.

Suddenly, outside the camp came the little pattering of feet.

"Stop there!" The guard hollered.

"I'm Jodel from the ambush unit. I have something important to report to Mr. Commander."

"Let him in." Brian opened his eyes abruptly.

The tent flap was pulled open, and a man stumbled in, his face smeared with blood, all shaky and breathless. He sank to his knee, panting, but his eyes were glinting with excitement.

"Sir, we won!"

Chapter 1033: The King of Graycastle (III)

Brian walked out of the tent and saw the victorious soldiers return one after another.

Compared to how they had looked when they had marched for war, they now looked no better than a bunch of refugees. They were all ragged and covered in blood. It was obvious that they had just returned from a fierce battle.

The number of casualties was astonishing. Out of the 2,000 soldiers that left, less than half were walking. All the horses and camels had been used to carry the wounded. Together with a few captured enemy soldiers, the group looked so beaten-up that it did not look like a well-trained army at all.

Nevertheless, their spirits were high. Everybody was excited about the victory.

This was literally the first time that the small tribes were able to defeat the big clans of Iron Sand City!

Brian knew this past battle had made those hunters true soldiers.

He was more pleased to see that the ambush team, although battered and dishevelled, had followed his instructions that no soldier should abandon his weapons under any circumstances.

Most of their water sacks and ration bags were gone, and some had even lost one of their shoes, but all of them still had their guns and swords.

The First Army could not be stationed in the Southern Territory to protect Sand Nations forever. They must be able to carry out Graycastle's policies among their tribesmen by themselves. Brian knew the King of Graycastle wanted more than a simple implementation.

He wanted more soldiers, more Mojins to participate in the Battle of Divine Will.

Now, these people were qualified to move on to the next step.

Brian turned around in satisfaction and nodded at Jodel, "Tell me the details of the battle."

It was a pretty straightforward battle, although it was full of errors and accidents. The initial plan was that the 2,000 strong army should be divided into two groups. One would sneak into Silver Stream Oasis and advance to the north during the night to make an impression that they were planning to attack the saline land, while the other would wait for the enemy in an uninhabited oasis at the end of the Silver Stream so that they could launch an ambush.

Provoked by the smaller tribes, the Wildwave and Cut Bone Clans had soon dispatched an infantry of more than 800 people to pursue the "traitors". Although there were many "traitors", the two clans had not taken them seriously. In their opinion, this group were even weaker than the watchdogs.

As the battle had progressed, the enemy had soon been lured into the ambush. Everything had gone well up to this point.

The "baits" were supposed to dismount and yield. They should have found an opportunity to disperse the horses once the enemy had dismounted as well. Then the ambush squad would have launched their attack. However, the group responsible for blocking the retreating path had set the fire too early. As the road had been ablaze, the enemy had realized something had gone wrong and started to retreat. Had they not prepared a large amount of blackwater beforehand, the enemy would have probably escaped.

The battle then turned to chaos. The "baits" had drawn out their swords and flung themselves at the enemy, and so had the ambush team. Many people had used the flintlock just once, completely forgetting the loading and firing skills they had learned during training. In the end, they had resorted to their traditional combat method: a hand-to-hand fight.

Like Brian had said, the people of the Sand Nation had weapons other than flintlocks. With the horses neighing and fires sizzling in the air, the withering, small oasis had become the location where the two parties had started an intense, life-and-death struggle. One moment a soldier had lunged at a horserider, and the next a horse had trampled a man. When two people tussled, teeth could also be a lethal weapon.

The small tribes also had warriors. Since the people of the Sand Nation had started to learn how to cope with the harsh living conditions from the moment they had been born, almost everyone that had survived the venom of sandworms or scorpions possessed excellent combat skills. Indeed, there was no large difference between a member from a big clan and one from a small tribe in terms of individual physical strength.

What those small tribes lacked was resources. Inadequate resources limited their ability to reproduce and expand. No warrior could defeat ten people at a time, no matter how strong he was. As long as the tribes remained small in size, it would be impossible for them to compete with the big clans.

But now, they had what they needed.

All the soldiers were from the ten Silver River Clans. Since everyone shared the same food, wore the same clothes, slept on the same bed, and received the same training, they did not have to fight for resources. Now what they needed was simply the courage and determination to challenge the big clans in Iron Sand City.

The massacre of the small tribes committed by the Wildwave and Cut Bone Clans had encouraged them to stand up for themselves.

The battle had lasted all night.

The Sand Nation army had gained a tough victory.

By the time the fires were quenched, the oasis was covered with blackened wood. Since all the trees were gone, the sand would

soon drain the little water around this area, and Silver Stream would shrink further, exposing more oases to wind deflation.

But the people of the Sand Nation would survive.

The battle preluded the eventual disappearance of the oases, but it also pointed out the direction in which the people of the Sand Nation should head.

After hearing Jodel's report, Brian walked up slowly to the returning soldiers.

"Good job! You should be proud of yourselves because you protected your people! This is a victory belonging to you, so you have the right to decide on how to deal with these captives."

Brian pointed toward the captured warriors from the big clans.

"Kill! Kill them!"

"Sir, they killed my family!"

"They should pay for that!"

Brian's eyes met with the anxious ones of the people of the Sand Nation. He gave them a casual wave and they immediately understood what to do.

With clanks and clatters, numerous swords were drawn out from their scabbards.

Blood blossomed and soaked the coarse sand beneath their feet. The soldiers' morale had reached its peak!

"But Iron Sand City still poses a threat to us. The Wildwave and Cut Bone Clans will still dispatch their troops to the interior of Silver Stream, so your tribesmen are still exposed to danger," Brian proclaimed. "The chief has granted you the right to permanently live in the oasis, but the traitors attempt to ruin everything! Tell me, what should you do?"

"Take Iron Sand City and drive them out of Blackwater Swamp!"

"Let them know the consequence of betraying the chief!"

"Commander, some of my friends are still in the oasis. Please allow them to join us!"

"And also my... my sisters!"

Guelz and Thuram stepped a few paces back involuntarily, shocked at the soldiers' reactions.

Brian looked in the direction of Neverwinter.

"Your Majesy, we've shed the traitors' blood, and I hope this will be a nice present for your coronation. The Mojins who used to only care about themselves have started to work together. I believe that sooner or later, you will be able to take over Iron Sand City."

But this was just the beginning.

"The entire Southernmost Region will eventually become a part of your territory. There will be nobody on this desert to challenge your authority."

I hope you like my gift.

Chapter 1034: Subtle Hints at the Ceremony

The coronation celebration lasted all day, from noon all the way through to the evening.

The central square was saturated with the warm aroma of savory soup as it simmered in pots above the fire. Within the pots, a thick layer of spicy oils glazed the surface displaying the richness of the soup. It was made so that anyone could add the food they wanted and eat as they pleased. As spices were still considered as luxuries in this era, the party attracted many civilians. Some people even brought jars and barrels, hoping that to bring some soup home to savor every drop of it later.

City Hall was in charge of continuously adding water and broth into the pots. With each addition of chopped beef bones and sausages, the crowd would burst into loud cheers.

This would have been an incredible scene during the Months of Demons in the past.

People used to breathe gingerly during a long winter season, for cold represented death. But now, they could appreciate the snow drifting down from the sky and express their love for life without such fear.

Because they knew there would be enough food to keep them warm.

Everybody raised their cups in celebration of the new king while sending him their blessings.

...

Sylvie turned around and watched the bustling castle hall.

People here were also having a good time.

There was plenty of delicious food, wine, music and laughter.

The party became even more boisterous when Roland and Anna

presented themselves in their wedding gowns.

It was Sylvie's first time to see such a unique wedding gown. Completely different from the white dress the bride had worn on the Chief Knight's wedding, the new one designed by Roland was actually nothing like a nightgown. The dress was mainly in red and gold, with long sleeves and a full skirt. Its shoulder parts were ornamented with two patterned ribbons of intricate and elegant designs.

Not many people could pull off such a bright color, but the dress was perfect for Anna. She was a genius fire controller and one of the most outstanding witches of this era. The bright red outfit made her look even more stunning whilst also making her display a gracious and queenly aura.

Everybody raised their glasses, to which Roland and Anna returned a smile. It was a perfect party.

But Sylvie was all tensed up.

She had noticed something strange at the ceremony.

As she had the Eye of Magic, she was obligated to detect anything out of character before anyone else and promptly notify the other guards. For things like a coronation ceremony, she had to make sure Roland was absolutely safe, not only because he was Princess Tilly's brother but also because it was her responsibility as a guard. Therefore, Sylvie had been extremely cautious, making sure that she did not miss anything.

Each incident seemed insignificant if she looked at them separately. However, once she pieced them together, she found something suggestive.

This reminded Sylvie of a song Roland often hummed.

The lyrics were quite interesting, which read "a walking stick blackened, a strong floral scent softened ... many jigsaw puzzles that might not make sense to you, would eventually lead you to the

discovery of a truth well hidden."

It was worth noting that after Mystery Moon heard the tune, she made it the song of the Detective Group.

The situation this time had been exactly as the lyrics described.

Sylvie did not know what the problem was. Normally, she would have warned Nightingale and Ashes by now.

But this time, she kept silent.

Because she suddenly remembered what Anna had told her two days ago.

"The person who keeps the secret is always the one that knows it. I need your help, Sylvie."

At that time, she had not understood the meaning behind it, so she had not given it much thought.

But now, as if struck by a sudden enlightenment, Sylvie saw the full picture. Anna's words were the last piece of the puzzle that had just been slotted into place.

She discovered a secret.

Sylvie did not take delight in it. Instead, she felt a huge burden being laid upon her shoulders.

Because now she had to not only keep the secret but also stop others from noticing it.

Someone else had probably also noticed those subtle signs!

Sylvie surveyed the entire hall. Her eyes rested on three people.

"Achoo!"

Lorgar rubbed her nose, glancing about suspiciously.

"What's the matter?" Andrea asked. "Wolves can also catch a cold?"

"I'm not sure if it's my nose. I've been feeling something wrong

since this morning." Lorgar made a sniff. "The odors I smell seemed inconsistent with the number of people here..."

"Inconsistent?" Ashes cut in. "Can you actually tell people apart by their smells?"

"I can as long as they aren't too far apart and there's no interference of a strong scent," said Lorgar with a nod.

"There are nearly 100 people in the hall," said Andrea with an incredulous look. "Even if you do have an acute sense of smell, you can't remember all the odors people are giving off. Besides, many of them are wearing perfumes. They also tend to touch others, like this." With these words, Andrea touched the back of Ashes' hand with the hand she had just used to eat a chicken drumstick. "I'll also have her odor on me now. Can you still tell us apart?"

"It's difficult... but still, I can tell whether a certain individual is present or not." Lorgar dropped her ears in confusion. "Nobody is moving about, but I notice some scents are on and off. Why is that?"

"Ahem." Sylvie appeared behind the three witches and said, "You're probably sick."

"Sylvie?" Andrea raised her brow. "How come you're here?"

"I'm just walking around and overheard your conversation." She shrugged and looked at the wolf girl. "The weather on the desert in the south is quite different from that in the Western Region. It's easy to catch a cold. Plus, this is your first winter here, so it's normal that you are feeling under the weather. If you feel there's something wrong with your nose, you might as well drink some Lily's Cleansing Water. I was like that too when I first came here."

"Really?" Lorgar seemed to suddenly understand the reason. "I see."

Sylvie walked off, feeling a bit relieved.

Because of her ability, Lorgar Burnflame possessed far better

hearing and a much more acute sense of smell than ordinary people. As she had an animal intuition, Sylvie needed to watch out for her all the time.

Fortunately, she had successfully prevented her from discovering the secret.

Now, her next target was —

"Coo, coo, coo, coo coo coo coo... coo!" Perched on Lightning's head, Maggie was talking to Joan in excitement.

"Ya, ya ya, yaa — ya!" Joan returned as if the two people were discussing a very interesting topic.

"Oh well, whatever..." Sylvie clapped her hand over her forehead. Even if they did find out something, they would not understand it.

Likewise, nobody would be able to read something out of their conversation either.

At this thought, Sylvie locked her Eye of Magic on her third target.

This was probably the person who was most likely to discover the secret and also the most difficult one to deal with out of the three.

It was Honey.

Chapter 1035: An Obscure and Wonderful Night

As a key figure of the Graycastle Weekly, Honey basically had informants everywhere. This combined with the advantages offered by Lorgar and Maggie. The olive forest in the castle backyard was like her headquarters and to escape from her detection was not easy.

Yet that was not the whole story.

Having the earliest access to interesting anecdotes in the city, she could always attract a large number of witches during gatherings. For instance, at the moment, the batch of witches that gathered around her was the biggest one in the hall.

Besides Mystery Moon and the other members of her Detective Group, Nightingale, Wendy, and Scroll were not easily fooled. Even Leaf, who had not shown herself for quite some time, also seemed to be talking about something with Honey.

"Conceal the secrets you know, and keep others from knowing them."

Sylvie took a look at Anna at the other end of the Hall. Thinking of the words Anna had given her, she walked toward Anna unwillingly.

"What do you think of these birds?" Leaf's voice went into Sylvie's ears. "They're the new species I found in the Misty Forest, not big, but fly very fast. They're so bold that they even dare to steal from a gray eagle nest. I figured that they might be helpful to you one day, so I took a nest of them back."

Sylvie saw two big Kingfisher and one small one standing on Leaf's shoulders and rubbing her face intimately, which gave her a completely different impression as the brave birds Honey just described.

"Sure, thank you." Honey took over the birds delightfully. "I haven't seen you for quite a while. I feel like you've become a qualified bird trainer."

"They probably think of me as a part of the forest," Leaf said smilingly. "Then again, the changes that happened in the town really surprised me... not only are there more houses, there are also such novel things like magic film and newspaper. If it wasn't for the fact that exploring the deep forest is equally enjoyable, I would have envied you."

"You should come back more often," Wendy said softly. "Everybody misses you."

"I missed you too..." Leaf's eyelids lowered. "But nowadays only the southeast edges of the Misty Forest are under the control of the Heart of Jungle, I must stay integrated with the forest as long as possible so as to adapt to its ever-enlarging consciousness. To control the entire forest before the arrival of the war, I could do nothing but seize all the time I could..."

"You've worked hard." Scroll stroked her hair tenderly. "I'll ask Lightning to send the newly published newspapers to you every week so that you'll know what's going on in Neverwinter at any time."

"That is a wonderful idea," Mystery Moon shouted, "but what's written in the newspaper are things known to all. Compared to that, I prefer to know the secrets that are only known to a few." She then looked at Honey and said, "If you ever find something suspicious, please do tell the Detective Group. We have the most skillful detectives who'll ensure all your puzzles will be solved."

Hearing the word 'secret', Sylvie's heart began to extremely tense up.

Such a fool. She asked too directly! How can I divert the topic? No... It's too hard a task for me to avoid Nightingale and Wendy's attention and divert Mistry Moon at the same time!

"Em, there are quite a few..." Honey said, tilting her head.

"Oh?" Mistry Moon's eyes sparkled. She said hurriedly, "Such as?"

"This is a big problem!" Sylvie felt a deep desperation. "Will it work if I pretend to faint or be drunk? But I'm not able to act that well... sorry Anna, I've tried my best."

"Oh, although I'm also curious, I'm not going to tell it." Honey stuck out her tongue. "I especially can't tell His Majesty Roland—this is out of sister Wendy's request. She also said that no matter what anomaly I find, I need to report to her first."

"Oh?" Mistry Moon looked at Wendy in surprise. "This isn't fair!"

Wendy coughed twice. "I think this is for the good of the Witch Union—you'll be safer not knowing something."

Sylvie let out a long sigh.

Thus the latest crisis was averted.

I've successfully kept the secret... haven't I?

An anxious Sylvie had the toughest dinner party in her life.

After the banquet, Roland returned to the bedroom with Anna.

At the moment, this place had been as decorated as their wedding room. Under the flickering candlelight, Anna's figure in the wedding dress appeared dimmer, yet it exuded a particular sense of grace.

Roland walked up, gently took down her bridal veil, lifted up her bang, and stared into her eyes.

In the pair of eyes that were as clear as a lake, he saw rippling affection.

"Say my name, ok?"

"Anna?"

"No." Her eyes blinked. "My full name."

"Anna Wimbledon."

"Once more."

"Anna Wimbledon."

"Can you call me that ten more times?"

Roland gently smiled. "As many times as you want."

After hearing Roland whispering in her ear, Anna lowered her head shyly. "My request... is it a little weird?"

"A little." Roland poked at her nose. "You'll get tired of hearing this name in the future. You're my wife, with or without my family name."

In the world he came from, marriage did not require one party of the couple to change family names, so he did not care much about the name change after marriage.

"Even so, I feel I'm complete this way..." Anna pressed one hand on her chest. "I feel I'm no longer alone. That's probably the point of any ceremony... either wearing a crown or changing a title, people are just acquiring a self-identification through the attached external changes. Although emotions between two people need no verification through a ceremony, without this link, a couple might feel pitiful and regretful afterward."

"..." Roland could not help but hold her in his arms.

At this moment, any answer would have appeared redundant.

After a little intimacy, Anna said, "Roland, can I ask for something?"

If Roland remembered correctly, this was the first time that Anna ever asked something of him.

"Sure, go ahead."

"I want to take the post of the minister of the Department of

Industry."

Roland was a little surprised. "This isn't a problem, but why do you suddenly..."

"Because I'm only a common girl born in a remote small town," Anna said smilingly. "Now I am suddenly the queen of Graycastle. I guess there must be many people feeling discontent."

"Don't worry. Nobody dares to gossip about it," Roland consoled her.

"If everything has to be quieted down by you, it would only add to people's suspicion." She shook her head. "I can't keep on hiding behind you and only indulge in things that I'm interested in. I want to do more, offering people no excuses to accuse me."

"You've gone from being an unknown witch to becoming a figure taking charge of a whole department by yourself?" Roland smiled subconsciously. "I've never intended to keep you in that narrow backyard..."

"As you wish, my dear."

"Thank you for indulging my willfulness." Anna stood on her tiptoe and gently kissed Roland on his forehead. "Right, haven't you always been curious about what I talked with Nightingale that one night?"

"Um..." Roland slightly paused. "I'll be lying if I say I wasn't, but..."

"It's alright," she said smilingly. "It was an agreement, and I've fulfilled it. Now... carry me to bed."

The candle was put out by a string of Blackfire. The curtain of the night covered their silhouettes like a thin veil.

What an obscure and wonderful night.

...

Chapter 1036: Regime of the New Kingdom

On the second day after Roland's inauguration, he called for the third plenary session in the castle's reception hall.

The main content of the session was the distribution of power, which concerned the officers the most.

As the advocates of choosing the right side, this session was undoubtedly the moment that these officers had long hoped for. To serve the local lords and to serve the king were two totally different concepts. Especially since most of them had worked in the City Hall, so they had a rough mastery of the new king's idea of "weakening the local, strengthening the center" to concentrate power. They understood their promotion had special significance, which meant they had gone from being nobodies to the top officers of the Kingdom of Graycastle. What they would govern was no longer be a small piece of land in Western Region, and their influence would be stronger than the former great nobles.

Roland would not allow his officers' ambitions of ascending to the skies with a single leap to keep on growing, so he laid down the general principle right at the beginning of the session. "First of all, I'd like to congratulate each of and every one of you. Anyone who is invited to this session will join the elite class of Graycastle. In the next few decades, you will be joining me in the endeavor of governing this kingdom."

"That's flattery, Your Majesty." Barov took the lead to stand up and bow. "It's our honor to serve you! Just tell me whatever you want me to do. I'm at your disposal!"

Although what he said meant to be humble, Barov's face wrinkled with the smile he put on. Obviously, he had many expectations for his path ahead.

Roland nodded smilingly. He gestured for the rest to sit down, then said slowly, "I have to mention one thing first. The reason I

took back the nobles' feudal power is to replace them with capable personnel. A kingdom's prosperity depends on the number of talents who are working for it. I don't hope to see you turning into another kind of noble."

"Of course..." Barov said hurriedly. "Nobody can be sure that his descendants will be as equally capable, so all the positions should be dispatched to the most capable."

The others instantly agreed with Barov.

Roland wasn't so sure. He felt these City Hall officers had changed a lot and their flattery sounded a lot more smooth, and the expressions in their eyes were filled with an unexplainable awe. The changes brought him a vague sense of satisfaction.

This was probably also the effect of the ceremony.

No wonder Timothy and Garcia did not hesitate to drag more than half of the kingdom into the fires of war.

Yet Roland did not indulge himself in this kind of satisfaction for long. Even as a supreme king, what he governed was no more than a corner of the extensive continent. "If I'm content with what I've accomplished, what difference would I have with a sheik from an isolated island?"

The world is so big. I want to see it.

"What you said is only the most basic point." Roland looked around the hall. "As a matter of fact, even the most capable could not be guaranteed to always be qualified for their positions! There are many ways to ruin one's prospect, such as external temptation, the solidification of ideas, and the desire to expand one's influence. You are not exceptions."

With the rising of Roland's voice, the officers lowered their heads, not even daring to breathe heavily.

"Therefore, entering them as the starting officers is only the start for your career. Your abilities and performances will be assessed

annually. Whether you're to be promoted or stay where you are will be decided by the assessment." Roland paused. "Of course, there could be a worse consequence. For example, those who insist to knowingly causing damage to the kingdom will be removed from their positions and sent to trial!"

"Your Majesty..." Barov asked carefully, "May I know who will write this assessment report?"

"Myself." Roland looked at him. "Are there any more questions?"

Although it was Nightingale from the Security Bureau who would do the investigation, Roland felt it was more fitting to tell people that he would be the one executing the assessment.

"No, I... have none."

"I know what's on your mind," Roland proceeded. "You must be thinking that you've gone such a long way to achieving this, it's supposed to a time for your reward, and if you have to keep on giving great effort, but behave like you are walking on thin ice, what's the point of becoming the starting officers. Yet what I'm about to say is your reward doesn't contradict with what I've said just now. Instead, they're supplements to each other. As long as you finish the tasks I give you, I don't mind that you seek profit for yourselves. It's like dividing a piece of bread. When the bread gets big enough, everyone can eat well even with a very small portion of it; on the contrary, if the bread is too small, one can't eat enough even if he eats it all by himself. As for the fact that those who stand in the front of others will get his slice of bread sooner, I think all of you can understand that."

The resources an officer of upper rank got was far greater than his listed salary, and the connections and power he had access to were far more effective capital than money. If one even failed to see that, Roland would not want him to continue to have a say in the City Hall.

The driving effect of the combination of stick and carrot had

been repeatedly tested in the rivers of history. Although it was still a little rough, Roland had begun to master the use of it.

"Before I announce the new appointments, you can still choose to give up your career in the government. Those who choose to give up will get a large number of gold royals as compensation, which is enough for you to squander for the rest of your life, but if you decide to stay, you'll have to take on the responsibilities and obligations of an officer. Now, make your decisions!"

Nobody dared to leave. Even the minister of Chemical Industry who had complained constantly in the beginning and wished to retire as soon as possible remained silent at this moment. Obviously, through the two years' of experience of holding a political position, he understood the significance of the post of a minister in requesting for appropriation from Barov.

"Alright," Roland smiled and said, "here are your appointments."

Compared with the old City Hall, the biggest change in the new power system was that the towns in all the regions were also put under the management framework.

Roland adapted a modern method and set the big cities as provinces whose prefecture included their surrounding residential areas such as towns and villages. The manager of a province was called a governor, the same rank as a minister. Every province needed to set its own city hall, which was under the control of the City Hall in Neverwinter.

As this was building on the foundations on the previously established secondary City Halls, such a transformation was not difficult. Although the workload of the ministers would greatly increase, their power would correspondingly rise up to a new level.

Barov, as he had always wished, was promoted to the Hand of the King. He was responsible for coordinating all the departments, and concurrently in charge of the Treasury. As an old chief who was among the first batch of Border Town's managers and who

cultivated numerous talents for the City Hall, his appointment could not be any more suitable. He didn't expect that a joking promise Roland made four years ago could be realized today.

Apart from some similar institutions like the king's city City Hall, the army, Security Bureau, Witch Union, etc, Roland also established a whole new department: Headquarters of the General Staff.

This was different from the staff organization that served in a combat capacity. The Headquarter of the General Staff took charge in making foreign policies, and any specific schemes about strategic plans. With the expansion of the strength of Graycastle and the increasing threat of the Battle of Divine Will, the future connections among the other three kingdoms and the Fjords were bound to grow tighter. That was why Roland needed a visionary department to assist him in controlling the overall situation.

As for its minister, it was none other than Edith Kant, the Pearl of the Northern Region.

Chapter 1037: Massacre On the Snow-covered Plains

After appointing roles to everyone, they spoke their oaths out loud as per Roland's request.

This was the first time the officials had to go through such a process. However, as surprised as they were, they still followed their King's orders without delay, with their chest held high.

The oath itself was nothing special: "Loyal to the King, dedicated to your duty." These were the words that all the officials would say, but speaking them out loud on a formal occasion in front of a crowd had a dramatically different effect. These words seemed to have come to life and reverberated in everyone's minds.

Roland knew then that they were slowly uniting as one.

"Now that you have passed the ceremony, let's get started." Roland rose from his throne and slapped the map behind him, "We shall eliminate all threat of the demons in the Fertile Plains and ensure that the northwestern side of Neverwinter is safe for us to build the foundation for humanity's mass migration back to the plains."

The two defeats humanity had suffered previously had pushed humanity up against a wall with the ocean at their back and nowhere to escape. Marching West was now their only way forward, both for the acquisition of more resources and as a strategic move against the demons.

The First Army must gain control of the Taquila ruins if the people of Greycastle were to settle in the plains properly. Without a source of God's stones, the demons would not be able to build their obelisks, and Greycastle could then safely expand its borders. This would give them the chance to either continue on with Graycastle's development or prepare a counterattack on the

demons.

After all, humans were not restricted by the red mist.

With technology development, the First Amy's weapons' effective range would also improve.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Everyone shouted.

After the meeting, Roland went back to his office, and Nightingale served him red tea that she had prepared beforehand.

"Good work."

She had a carefree expression on and the dried fish that was dangling from her mouth meant that she was in a good mood.

"Ah... Thank you," Roland picked up the fragrant tea. He suddenly recalled the words that Anna had said last night and gazed at Nightingale.

What was the promise that Anna talked about? She did not explain in detail last night, but Nightingale was present at both the inauguration ceremony in the morning and the wedding in the evening. It did not seem like she had time to fulfill any sort of a "promise".

This issue still puzzled him.

Also, Roland felt that if he asked them directly, no one would give him an answer.

"What's wrong?" At that moment, Roland heard Nightingale's voice next to his ear, "Do you think I look good today?"

"No ... Ermm," He quickly sipped his tea to cover up his bewildered expression, "I mean, not bad..."

"So do I look good or not?" Nightingale leaned down and looked Roland deep in the eyes. Roland could smell the sweet smell of her hair. "Your heart is in turmoil," Nightingale observed.

Before he could reply, she went away and leaned on a chair,

chewing her dried fish, seemingly pleased with herself.

Realizing that she was only teasing him, Roland shook his head, yet at the same felt glad that she didn't pursue the matter.

However, one thing was certain.

She was still the Nightingale he had always known.

...

Western Region, in the sky above the snow-covered Barbarian Lands.

"What is our current speed?"

No reply.

Lightning could only hear the sound of wind gushing past her ear and she could hardly even open her mouth. If she tried to speak right now, her tongue would probably be torn apart by the headwind. She had no choice but to synchronize with her magic power.

The freezing sensation disappeared in an instant and the sound of wind became somewhat bearable.

"Maggie, what is our speed now?" She asked again.

"Let me check, Coo!" Maggie stuck her head out from Lightning shirt, "It's about two times faster than a gray eagle, coo."

This was most likely related to a beast's sharp instincts, but Maggie had a great sense of speed. So bringing her along was much more convenient than using magic power to measure their speed.

"Three hundred kilometer per hour?" Lightning sighed. When a gray eagle dived to catch a prey from the sky, its speed can reach up to hundred fifty kilometers per hour and almost no prey could dodge the attack. Now that Lightning had far surpassed the top speed of the eagle, she did not seem to feel glad wholeheartedly.

Three hundred kilometers.... This was the limit without

synchronization.

After her magic powers had evolved, she spent a lot of time to get used to her new ability and learn the technique to control the level of magic power. In other words, if she can handle the discomfort under high-speed flight, then she would be able to minimize the use of her magic power.

To deal with this problem, Roland had provided her with a new set of equipment, including a pair of wind goggles, clothes with a double-layer thermal insulator, smaller backpack, and decreased the weight of the gears to the minimum.

All these adjustments helped her break her record, yet there still seemed to be limitations due to her body. It seemed like three hundred kilometer per hour was a bar that could not be passed.

Moreover, there was a drastic increase in the use of magic power after synchronizing.

Lightning couldn't help but admire the robust body of that Extraordinary, Ashes.

Of course, every witch's ability is determined at birth, and the only thing she could do now was to work hard to get stronger.

Perhaps she could ask Lorgar about training a tougher body after they returned to Neverwinter.

"Heads up, Coo!" Maggie shouted while in her arms, "We are already a hundred kilometers away from the Taquila ruins!"

"Ah okay..." Lightning closed her eyes, felt the magic reserves in her body and then smiled, "Then let's give the demons a nice surprise."

After she had finally gotten used to her new ability, His Majesty finally agreed to let her satisfy her explorer's cravings... Wait no, her request to scout. Even if she only flew at her slowest speed, those stupid demons would only be able to bite the dust. She would not encounter any danger as long as she planned her magic

expenditures well.

However, Lightning was not satisfied. She still remembered that time three years ago in the Barbarian Lands where she was scared stiff upon seeing an ice sculpture of a demon under the Taquila ruins. This is something she must redeem herself in as an explorer.

Fear stems from the unknown, and demons were no longer some terrifying creatures of the myths.

"Lightning, going full throttle!"

After she heard that, the pigeon quickly ducked her head and hid under the young girl's clothes.

Lightning kept on accelerating, and despite the protection from synchronizing, she could still hear the sound of wind tearing past her getting louder and louder, from an initially high-pitched screech to a deep rumble. Their views blurred as Lightning sped up even more, and eventually, the white plains under them looked like melting cheese, flowing past as they flew.

Then that moment came.

With a boom, there came utter silence.

It was as if she shook off the restraints the world had on her, as wind and snow was left flying past her, and the whole sky became her playground.

Like what the King had said earlier, she was now the one who left sound trailing behind.

No matter how many times she repeated this, Lightning would not get bored of it.

Sometimes she had thought that she was born just for this moment.

After a few minutes, the Taquila ruins rose above the horizon.

What surprised her was that the land around the ruins had suddenly changed color. It looked like the muddy ground after the

snow had melted. Yet, as she looked harder, she realized that the muddled background was a mixture of flesh and blood! Coal-black demonic beasts were swarming towards the ruins and smashed into the defense lines of the demons like waves splashing onto a shore.

Before their bodies broke into pieces.

Chapter 1038: Enemies from the Abyss

"That's..." said Lightning as she slowed down. Her eyes widened open.

Thousands of demonic beasts were swarming on the snowfield. It looked as if a black carpet was laid over the white snow. The moving "carpet" somehow reminded her of ants gnawing at corpses.

This time, however, it was not corpses they were facing, but demons who were equally brutal.

The skyscraper-like skeleton monsters moved slowly among the demonic beasts as they jostled enemies aside. With every step they took, a few demonic beasts would fail to escape and be crushed below. Their four crooked limbs looked as slim as tree branches compared to their huge size, but Lightning believed that they were thicker than Lady Agatha's Spellcaster Tower if she viewed them close-up.

There were numerous Mad Demons clinging to the monster's abdomen, towering over the beasts as they hurled their spears down. The beasts, however, had no choice but to keep pushing forward, even though their counter-attacks took little effect.

"Magic Power Parasite."

These words crossed Lightning's mind.

It was a kind of deformed demon that was between the living and the dead. It had no fixed form and was parasitic on the skeletons and black stone-like blobs. It relied on the magic power to move and launch strikes. The Spider Demons discovered in the battle on the Northbound Slope and the leviathan she was watching now were both very likely to belong to the same species.

Though the demonic beasts' tusks were sharp, they barely did any harm to the stone-like monsters. They had no choice but to

bypass the skeleton monsters and attack the main body of the enemies behind these monsters.

Without a wall for the demons to take cover, the battle would be very tough.

Frenzied beasts may have the advantage when facing unarmed humans, but the odds did not favor them this time as Mad Demons were extremely strong and fast. Although they had sent out many demonic hybrid species, the demons had Lords of Hell, Siege Beasts, and Spider Demons at the front line to counter, allowing them to slaughter the demonic hybrid beasts almost as fast as the First Army did. As a result, demonic beasts could not gain an edge over the demons, even though they largely outnumbered their enemies.

Perhaps sensing the speed had slowed down, Maggie poked her head out. She gasped upon seeing such a horrendous scene.

"The demonic beasts and demons... They're fighting?"

"So that's the reason why Neverwinter has such peaceful Months of Demons," said Lightning while pretending to analyze the problem professionally. "But it's a bit weird, didn't the Taquila ancient witches say that the demonic beasts always come after the relics of gods? I'm certain that the demons' king wouldn't bring their relics to this piece of the wastelands... This means the demonic beasts must have gathered here for other reasons. It's too bad that Sylvie didn't come with us, or we could collect more information."

Maggie cocked her head to the side and asked, "Are you still going to surprise them?"

"Of course!" said Lightning decisively. "We're so close to the ruins of Taquila, yet the Devilbeasts haven't come to stop us, so they must be distracted by the battle. What a good chance this is for us."

There was no doubt that both the demons and the demonic

beasts are His Majesty's enemies. The more fierce the battle between them became, the more relaxed the army would be during the expedition that was going to start early next spring.

Lightning estimated the magic power in her body was enough for her to maintain flight at supersonic speeds for three to four minutes. In case of any dangers, she would save half of that magic power. This was more than sufficient for escaping. Overall, she was left with only two minutes to shake the demons' defense line. Thus, she had to be very cautious when choosing her flight path.

Her eyes stopped at the giant skeleton monster.

Its deformed body structure looked like an askew bench from far away. The skeleton features were composed of flat long black stones. It looked slightly similar to the glider runway built on the east coast. They seemed to be an ideal place for her to fly over.

According to her ability test results, the lower she flew, the greater the damage she would cause. Therefore if she could fly closely by the monster, the Mad Demons in its abdomen would surely suffer greatly from the impact.

His Majesty had instilled the principles of high-speed flying into her since she had awakened to this higher level. She knew that body size also decided how much energy could be detonated when her speed passed the sound barrier. If it was Maggie flying at supersonic speed over Neverwinter during that night, the whole city might have been ruined.

Hence, Lightning did not plan to crush the demons in one fell swoop.

She just wanted to make the demons suspend their attacks.

The areas under the skeleton monsters were like death zones. The demonic beasts had to avoid this. As a result, their moving speed was significantly slowed. If those brazen skeleton monsters could be pinned down, the demons' back line of defense would

become more pressured.

Even if the plan did not work out, she would not be affected anyway.

As soon as she made her decision, Lightning pressed Maggie's head onto her chest and swooped toward the nearest skeleton monster!

At that moment, she had completely forgotten what Roland had warned her about.

No one could grasp sound by the tail. It was time to show them authentic flying skills!

The kilometers between her and battlefield had shrunken in a split second. When she appeared above the battlefield, it was dead silent.

But that was only in her opinion.

In the demons' eyes, it was as if thunder from the sky had all of a sudden crashed down and swooped them over. The result of the collision between the front and rear impact waves were overwhelming. While Lightning leveled off and flew five meters over the monster, the blast of the impact waves had turned the snow into clouds of white mist which almost enveloped the whole monster. The demons were howling in pain from the ear-splitting explosion.

But she had no time to enjoy how big the damage she had made, for she had five similar targets to handle.

Just as she was about to fly over the third skeleton monster, something unexpected happened!

Out of nowhere, a figure suddenly appeared on the bare platform she flying over to. The moment it stood there, it drew all her attention. There were still miles between them, but Lightning felt a sudden chill come over her. Her fingers could not stop shaking.

It was a demon, yet it looked human-like, except for its blue skin. It looked handsome and its golden eyes were deeper than the abyss of hell. They just stared at each other, but Lightning felt as though she was a frog being targeted by a viper. An instinctive dread rose from the bottom of her heart.

"What kind of monster is that?" thought Lightning.

She could feel the strong magic power in the demon's body as it distorted the surrounding air. Even though she was flying at a high speed, the power had oppressed her tangibly. It was as if she was stuck in a viscous mire and was being helplessly dragged towards the demon.

Run!

Now!

A voice was warning her to stop flying and run away immediately.

But she could not move her body at all. She had lost the control of her own body.

She saw the demon slowly raising its right arm towards her.

At this moment, something sharp pricked her chest.

It felt like someone had driven a nail straight into her body.

It was Maggie!

As the pain spread throughout the body, she instantly regained control of her limbs and time had returned to normal.

Lightning suddenly raised her body, flew upwards, and fled to Neverwinter as fast as she could without glancing back.

Chapter 1039: Decisions On Incoming Letters

"Your Majesty, this is the finance for this week," said Barov in exhilaration as he presented the report. "In short, the figures show a better uptrend than we've expected. As a matter of fact, they've spiked. In the past, this would have been a miracle!"

"Yes. Well done," said Roland as he leaned back in his chair. His expression was a lot calmer than Barov because he knew how the miracle had occurred. Both the population and economy had increased during the Months of Demons this year compared to summer and autumn, the busy seasons. This meant that the Months of Demons now had very little impact on Neverwinter. The turn of events was so dramatic, it was as if the snow outside the window was not real. For the people in this era, this report would completely reshape their common sense.

After all, when the cold winter came, people tended to consume more energy than being productive. It was as if they started to hibernate. Thus, an economic slump was commonly seen in winter. In the past, the entire border town was abandoned in winter. Hence, how could the production and trade continue without people?

However, Roland was aware that the people's choice of "hibernation" was nothing but a temporary compromise to deal with the harsh environment. Humans beings had the ability to change their environment. This allowed them to top thousands of creatures on earth throughout history. The concrete boat was immune to the wind direction and could work tirelessly, making heavy snow no longer a barrier; the heating system helped people keep warm; the hospital provided medical insurance; the plants were able to run even in bad weather. As human beings became more adaptive to the environment, the "miracle" would sooner or

later come.

In addition, the enthronement and the establishment of the new capital also played a role in surging these figures as people were always apt to gather in bustling places. This was a custom that has not changed for thousands of years.

Nowadays, the wide Redwater River seemed to be a bit crowded with so many concrete boats coming and going. At the end of the last year, the total number of the concrete boats manufactured in Neverwinter had exceeded 500. They had been designed for multiple purposes. Some of them had holes for quick loading and unloading; some had two stories where the lower story was for cargo while the upper story was for passengers. Its versatile design had been favored by many in the Chamber of Commerce. Since large scale of population migration could be a rare niche, the cement boats they had purchased now could be seen in many cities' docks.

Since news of the enthronement had spread, there were 500 or 600 people arriving at Neverwinter each day. One year ago, Barov had thought it was impossible to reach the population of 100,000, but the Western Region now had a total population of near 200,000, and 90% of them lived in Neverwinter.

Furthermore, it was a fact that the new capital was completely different to the traditional cities. It had neither grand walls nor division of the inner and the outer city. Instead, it was divided by circles of streets, which enlarged towards the suburbs. The city looked as if the city was a forest of houses.

Many people had criticized Neverwinter for its similar constructures and lack of ornate architecture.

But to Roland, those criticisms were another kind of compliment.

How could Neverwinter bear the rapidly increasing population if there were not so many houses to accommodate them? 200,000 people were almost equal to the combined total residents in the

rest of Graycastle's cities. If Neverwinter had to be walled and embellished with exquisite buildings such as the grand cathedrals, bell towers, and a palace, it would take him decades to complete.

Population was the basis of industrialization, they guaranteed the expansion of plants and provided the prerequisite for economic prosperity. The beauty of the city was the last thing he would care about.

Perhaps in his eyes, rows of chimneys discharging hot smokes were more beautiful than a magnificent palace.

Considering the time lag in spreading news, next year would see a more shocking growth.

"Stick to it, you'll get the reward you deserve," said Roland.

"Being the Hand of the King is the best reward I could ever have. It's your wise decision that makes such a difference. What I did is nothing but to follow your order," said Barov as he stroked his beard proudly.

Roland shook his head with amusement. "Do you have anything else to report?"

"Ah...Yes, Your Majesty," The old chief pulled out two letters. "These two letters were sent to the Administrative Office, but I think it requires your final decision."

"Oh?" Roland took the letter. The sender's name on the first letter looked familiar to Roland. "Kajen Fels?"

"Mr. Kajen is a great dramatist in the old king's city. He brought his troupe to Neverwinter and asked for a chance to perform a new play for you in the enthronement, but you didn't agree at the time," Barov reminded Roland.

Roland recalled it immediately. The first time he heard of this name was from the businesswoman Margaret. Back then, when he was asked about who he knew best in the capital, he blurted out the Magic Hand Yorko, which was really awkward. The City Hall

officials had reported their application for a performance before the enthronement and also handed in the scripts, but he rejected the application after he quickly ran through the script. He had planned the magic movie staring Lorgar for a long time, and there was no way to cancel it for a drowsy play of a bland imperial love story.

"Mr. Kajen sent this letter before he left Neverwinter. I don't think you should be bothered with this trivia... but he was very prestigious. Are you..." The old chief's voice lowered as he said these words while looking hesitant.

Roland comprehended the implications of his statement.

According to the date on the letter, it had been a week since Barov received the letter. Barov seemed to have given much thought to this thing. He had known that his king was not good at appreciating the traditional dramas. As he saw Roland rashly deny Mr. Kajen application, the impression became deeper. Barov might be afraid of annoying Roland so he did not present the letter right after he received it. He had now hoped that Roland would spend some time reading the dramatist's letter.

As of far, he could see that Barov placed high praise on Kajen Fels.

Not only him, but also Margaret and the Chief Knight. Anyone from the old capital seemed to have a good impression of this dramatist.

If so, he may as well take a look at the letter.

Roland shrugged, unfolded the letter, and scanned through it quickly.

It was actually an inquiry about how to make the magic movie.

As Kajen had said in the letter, at first, he had asked the Star Flower Troupe about it, but May told him that the troupe was only responsible for the performance and the Witch Union was the one

who turned it into a mirage. As it may be confidential, she could not give him a detailed answer. Following this, he wrote an enquiry letter to the Witch Union, but the letter was returned soon after it was sent. It was explained that the Castle District does not accept any directly-sent letters. So he had no choice but to ask the City Hall again, in the hopes that they could ask the question for him.

Generally, the leader of an industry was most hurt when something overthrew their original thought. However, in this letter, Roland read none of the frustration but the man's eagerness for the magic movie.

"I see." Roland paused thoughtfully for a moment and said, "I'll write back personally."

He had treated both the drama and the magic movie as a way to propagate for Neverwinter. He had neither time nor the energy to shoot an old imperial love story, so he might as well explain it to Kajen directly and make him desist once and for all.

"Yes, Your Majesty," said Barov as he let out a sigh of relief.

"What about the other letter?" Roland asked as he unfolded the letter. Since it was sent to the Administrative Office, Barov must have screened the letter beforehand.

"It was from a merchant called Victor Lothar."

"Did he finally stop asking for a trade in package and popcorn?" Roland laughed.

"Yes, he wants to buy cotton." Barov nodded.

"Cotton?" Roland's hands paused. "Neverwinter doesn't grow it."

"He wants a customization of it," Barov replied. "He wants Miss Leaf of the Witch Union to customize it for him."

Chapter 1040: Victor's Plan

Leaf, who had contributed the most to the growth of grain production, had been mentioned in the picture-story book, *The Witch Diaries*, long ago, and the book had been available for sale in the Convenience Market since then, so it was not strange for a foreign merchant to know about her.

However, he was the first one to ask for a specific witch for a task. The people of the four kingdoms, unlike those adventurous folks in the Fjords, were deeply influenced by the church, so they had a significant amount of prejudice against the witches. Now that there was one of them who was willing to voluntarily work with a witch, Roland could not help being a little interested.

After reading the letter, he touched his chin and said, "Coming from the Kingdom of Dawn... Do you know where he's living in Neverwinter?"

"Yes," Barov said, "The Administrative Office has kept track of him. I also asked Lady Scroll to check the taxes he has paid and found that he started to pay taxes six years ago. But at that time he mainly purchased gemstones, occasionally some furs, all of which have nothing to do with cotton."

"Interesting." Roland was well aware of how simple the tax collection system was in this era. The tax collectors had to record every tax each person had paid, and as time went by, the collectors were liable to lose track of how much the taxes were really paid, let alone check the data. The permanent residents had no choice but to pay tax as their property was clear to see, while the merchants who frequently traveled between cities should have had many tricks to avoiding paying the tax collected by the local lords. The fact that Victor's tax record could be traced back to six years ago suggested that he must be a very honest and trustworthy man, which was really uncommon for merchants.

"Send for Victor," Roland said, putting down the letter. "I need to talk to him alone."

"As you command, Your Majesty."

...

Roland soon met the merchant in the meeting room.

He really did look like a citizen of the Kingdom of Dawn. Like Andrea, he had pale golden hair. He also had a pretty face and well-maintained skin. Overall, he looked like a well-bred nobleman with the right etiquette from a wealthy family.

It was hard to imagine such a man would travel between kingdoms for his livelihood. Instead of running the business himself, he could always order some reliable men to handle the general affairs. After all, in this era, long-distance travel was tough for anyone, whether they were rich or not.

Victor gave a proper explanation for Roland's confusion—family conflicts.

In order to eschew his elder brother's oppression and prove his ability, he had to leave his home and run a business in Graycastle.

Victor's story wasn't very convincing, but Roland didn't want to be too inquisitive. In any case, Roland wasn't interested in other people's affairs. Besides, since Nightingale had not given any response, the merchant was telling the truth.

After the introduction, Roland came to the point directly. "You want Leaf to culture productive cotton seeds and aim to set up a brand new clothes shop, which would be promoted to the entire kingdom with cheap and fine clothes made of the cotton?"

What Roland had asked was not his own imaginative idea but was actually written at the end of the letter. That was one of the reasons why Roland decided to see Victor personally. It was like someone had submitted a business plan aimed at raising 100 million yuan and all he lacked was Roland's investment worth 500

yuan.

"Not just the Kingdom of Graycastle." The merchant nodded. "I've calculated the price. The finished products will still be competitive in the Kingdom of Dawn even after including the price of shipping."

Selling at a low price could help the product muscle into the market, but... that was not easy. "How do you intend to guarantee that your products can be both cheap and fine?"

"First I'll need special cotton, Your Majesty," Victor said with enthusiasm. "Since Miss Leaf was able to produce the golden wheat that had a yield three times higher than the ordinary species, I think she should also be able to triple the cotton yield. If the price of raw materials can be reduced to one-third of the current price, then clothes will be much cheaper."

Roland could not help laughing. The logic behind Victor's words seemed right at first, but you would realize how ridiculous it was if you thought it over. It would be easy for Leaf to culture the productive cotton. In fact, with the help of the vast pool of magic power given by the Heart of the Forest, she was able to culture new seed variants much faster than before. However, the price of grains in Neverwinter was set low to stabilize the price, not because they could not be sold at a high price.

It would be a great problem if people could not afford food, so the price of grains had to be controlled and kept low. However, this was not the case for cotton, as people always had alternatives to choose from, such as linen, hemp, and furs.

"Okay... Let's assume Leaf is able to make the yield of cotton three times higher. Why should I sell this cotton to you at a discounted price when I can sell it to others at the market price?"

"Because I can save you a lot of investment and provide more than 2,000 jobs, providing employment for your city," Victor said without hesitation. "Aside from that, you can get a lot of tax

revenue, and your people can also benefit from it. In fact, you don't have to do anything, as I can handle all the management affairs and the production line."

Roland was surprised by Victor's answer that was full of modern terms. He considered it for a long while before he asked, "Did you learn those words... from the newspapers?"

"That, and every one of Neverwinter's announcements. I've studied them all. Some of the words may be quite awkward when I first read them, but they have helped me understand business from another angle," Victor said with his hand on his chest. "The other lords would throw me out if I had proposed a reduction in the price in front of them, but I believe you can see the value in this."

"This is quite a sneaky compliment... If I throw him out now, I'll be no different from 'the other lords'?" Roland smiled slightly. "Tell me your plan."

Victor spoke eloquently about his plan for nearly an hour. Apparently, he was well-prepared in advance.

His idea was not complicated. In brief, he wanted to build a business system that integrated the farming, textile production, and sales. House Lothar had quite a long history of making garments, so he already had much relevant experience and technique. Once the project started, it would not be long before they saw the fruits of their labor.

Of course, anyone could paint an attractive blueprint with their rhetoric, but Roland kept listening because he saw that Victor had taken many details into account and planned well in advance. Neverwinter was not a suitable place for growing cotton, so the plantation and the textile factory had to be located in the Southern Territory, where there was ample sunshine and high temperatures all throughout the year. Meanwhile, as the Sand Nation people were still moving in, there would be a great deal of labor available. Everything seemed to fit in with the plan. The final sewing and

garment production would be set up in Neverwinter, where it could be directly sold to the people here, who could afford the clothes.

Victor would be responsible for the initial investment and preparations, such as purchasing farmland, recruiting farmers, building manufacturing plants, and buying equipment. Neverwinter did not need to risk anything, for it spent neither time nor any money on the venture. As a matter of fact, apart from providing the productive strains cotton seeds, Neverwinter could just step back and reap the profits.

In addition, due to the simple usage of cotton, the output of the final products could be easily assessed from the amount of the materials that went in, so it was easy for Roland to calculate the tax, which was a relief to both him and Victor.

Among the advantages Victor had mentioned, Roland preferred two of them in particular: the first was that House Lothar already had efficient spinning tools that were capable of processing three times the yield of the cotton; the other was that they had trained a number of skilled tailors who often designed garments for the nobles in the City of Glow, so the clothes they made would be popular with many people. Victor also admitted that this business idea was inspired by when he watched 'The Wolf Princess'. He found that the citizens of Neverwinter were still plainly dressed, which was improper for a new capital.

These two points were the key to the entire plan, for, with them, this huge and ambitious business proposal was no longer a castle in the air, but actually quite feasible.

Chapter 1041: A Strange Wound

"A vertically integrated conglomerate..." Roland whispered.

"What?" Victor was stunned. "If you've any question about my plan, I can explain it again—"

"No, thanks." Roland waved his hand. "I think it's an interesting plan, and it seems feasible. I just want to know how long it'll take you to collect enough funds for it."

Victor's eyes shone with joy. "I knew you would understand it. Please excuse me for being blunt, Your Majesty. If you were a merchant, you'd definitely own a great Chamber of Commerce!"

It sounded like Victor was degrading the king by comparing him to a merchant, but Roland understood that for a businessman from the Kingdom of Dawn, praising someone's business talent was the sincerest form of flattery.

The business model suggested by Victor reminded Roland of modern companies that had an integrated system for production, supply, and marketing in the previous world where he had lived.

He had never expected that he would hear such a detailed commercial development plan from a man in this world. Compared to the conventional Chambers of Commerce, Victor understood more advanced concepts. He planned to include both production and sales in his business. He was willing to provide technology, employ a large number of people, and be responsible for his own profits and losses.

Roland thought that this might also be an opportunity for himself.

In the past few years, his domain had rapidly expanded, but many management problems had also emerged. Most of the industries and projects in Graycastle were directly operated by the Administrative Office. The officials had to spend lots of time

managing people and funds, which made the government departments overstaffed and greatly affected the government's administrative efficiency.

Since the officials' personal interests had nothing to do with the profit and loss situation of these "state-owned enterprises", they only worked according to the king's orders and tried their best to maintain these enterprises' stability. In the early stage of development, such enterprises, under the total control of the government, could quickly meet the kingdom's demands and complete some high-risk projects, but they weren't suitable for all economic endeavors.

Given these realities, Roland had only focused on developing heavy industries. Neverwinter did not have enough workers and the Administrative Office did not have enough qualified officials to develop light industries.

It was simple to give an order, but it was not always simple to carry it out. Even if it was just an expansion project, like building another steam engine assembly plant, he would still need lots of money and many trained workers.

But now, he realized that he had another option.

He could encourage private investment and let the businessmen organize things. He had no reason to turn Victor down, who came to him even before he adopted such policies.

Although it was a "foreign company", whose profits would inevitably go back to the Kingdom of Dawn, he did not mind it very much since its production department would remain in Graycastle.

After reaching a preliminary agreement, Roland accompanied Victor to the gate of the castle. "By the time you're ready, I'll be able to provide you with the new cotton seeds. But I need to tell you something in advance. If some day someone else wants to imitate you and comes to the Administrative Office asking for the

seeds, we'll sell the seeds to them at the same price. I want to see as many goods on the market as possible because I want to make prices more affordable for my people. I hope you understand that."

"I understand, Your Majesty," Victor replied, with a confident look in his eyes. "Merchants from the Kingdom of Dawn never dread competition. My father always said that from the moment we were born, the competition has already begun."

When he was about to leave, Roland stopped him. "Wait, I've another question. My minister found that you paid taxes to Longsong Stronghold six years ago. Why did you do that? It was easy for you to not pay at that time, wasn't it?"

Victor nodded. "Yes, it was, but back then, the lord promised that he would provide conveniences and protection for merchants who paid taxes. He honored his commitment and protected us when we were traveling between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. I'm happy to pay some money for a stable environment. It's a good thing for a merchant, but unfortunately, most of my peers would rather spend large sums of money on their merchandise than pay for stability and security."

Seeing the merchant leave, Roland thought, "What an interesting person and a serious businessman. He'll serve as a good example for the private entrepreneurs in Graycastle and lead the trend in the development of light industries."

He turned around, wanting to return to his office. Suddenly, Nightingale anxiously whispered in his ear. "Your Majesty, Lightning is back, and she seems to have gotten into serious trouble—"

"What happened?" asked Roland.

"I don't know... I've just received a call from Sylvie. Maggie brought her back and took her directly to the hospital!"

Roland's heart suddenly sank. "She's hurt? Take me to the

hospital now!"

"Yes." Nightingale reached out her hand and pulled him into the Mist.

...

They quickly arrived at the hospital and saw the little girl lying in bed.

He felt very relieved when he opened the door. Lightning was lying there with no bruises or blood stains. She was breathing peacefully and regularly. It seemed that she was already out of danger.

Nevertheless, he quickly noticed something was off.

Nana didn't look relaxed like she usually did after completing a treatment. Instead, she seemed confused, knitting her brows tightly and fixing her eyes on her own hands.

Beside the bed, Maggie was taking care of Lightning and wiping sweat from her forehead. She appeared nervous and winced when she saw Roland, as if she had done something wrong. Lightning was in a cold sweat and groaning slightly, as if she was troubled by a nightmare.

"How's she?" Roland looked at Nana. "Where's the wound?"

Nana raised her head and slowly pointed to her own chest.

"Nightingale."

"Yes." Nightingale stepped forward, carefully picked up Lightning and took off her windbreaker. After that, she started to unbutton her blouse. When she revealed her collarbones, she suddenly stopped. "Your Majesty, this is—"

Roland came closer to the bed and saw a thumb-sized wound several centimeters below her neck. It was particularly eye-catching on her white skin, but it was only a scratch. Normally, for a witch, such a minor injury would quickly heal without

treatment.

And healing such a wound should have been a piece of cake for Nana.

However, what Nana said astounded him.

"I can't heal her..." Nana murmured. "No matter how I tried, the wound just wouldn't heal, as if my healing ability just stopped working all of a sudden."

Chapter 1042: The Magic Curse

"Your healing ability... stopped working?" Nightingale was startled and then turned to look at Maggie. "Was Lightning injured by a Senior Demon?"

"Coo..." Maggie mumbled.

"What?"

"No..." She replied. This time they finally heard what she said. "It was me. I pecked on her chest, coo..."

"What?" Roland exchanged a surprised look with Nightingale, and then they asked simultaneously. "What happened at the time? You'd better tell us the story from beginning to end."

After hearing the whole story, Roland knitted his eyebrows tightly.

According to Maggie, Lightning had just been terrified by a mighty demon who looked like a human being. It had looked directly into her eyes from a distance to intimidate her when she had been trying her new ability. Roland could not help wondering how the demon managed to stare at a witch flying at the speed of sound. This sounded even more incredible than the news about the demons fighting the demonic beasts on the snowfield and the new discovery which suggested that skeleton monsters were also a kind of weapon.

Maggie said that back then, she had just wanted to wake Lightning up by pecking at her. Otherwise, she would have kept flying forward until she bumped into the enemy.

As for the reason why Lightning's wound remained unhealed, it probably had nothing to do with Maggie. She was not capable of causing such an injury, and even if she was, she would never hurt her best friend Lightning.

Given that, they decided to give the little girl a thorough

examination to identify the cause.

Roland sighed secretly. Before her departure, he had told her repeatedly that safety was the most important thing and had warned her that she should never take advantage of her new capability to go deep into a dangerous place. However, it turned out that as a daughter of an explorer, she just could not control the urge for exploration.

Roland knew that it was not a proper time to reproach Lightning. Now, he needed to find out where the problem was.

He asked Nightingale to fetch Wendy, Lily, Agatha and also Nightfall who could plant the Seed of Symbiosis in Lighting in case that some accidental injuries would happen during the examining process. In the evening, when Lightning finally woke up from her coma, the witches finally finished the examination and told Roland the results.

"You mean she's all right?" Roland gave a hasty glance at Lightning's pale face when she was curling up in Wendy's arms. "She doesn't look alright, does she?"

"She passed out of exhaustion caused by the prolonged flight. Nightfall can prove it. After she planted Seed of Symbiosis in Lightning, she didn't feel any discomfort. That means, her body is healthy and her coma only happened for some mental reason. She'll recover after resting a few more days."

"What about the wound?"

"This is exactly what I wanted to tell you next," Agatha said in a low voice. "Her problem is in her magic power. When I checked her power with the Stone of Measuring, I felt a hint of feedback that didn't belong to her."

"What... do you mean?" Roland was puzzled.

"As you know, magic power is everywhere, but if you want to use it, you must make it your own first. We call this process cohering.

After awakening, the magic power cohered inside our bodies will look like some objects, such as a cyclone. This is also true for demons. However, a demon's magic power looks completely different from a witch's. Seeing through the Stone of Measuring, a witch's power is clear like water while a demon's power looks muddy." She paused for a moment before adding, "The different feedback I received from Lightning's body looked exactly the same as a demon's power."

Roland was shocked, as this matter seemed to get quite tricky now. "Do you mean that the demon somehow eroded Lightning's magic power without touching her?"

"How is this possible?" Nightingale asked. "I can easily distinguish different types of magic power in the misty world. If she was eroded, I'd be able to see it."

"It's too small compared to Lightning's magic power, and thus can be easily overlooked." Agatha shook her head. "I just told you the test results of the Stone of Measuring. As for whether it's an erosion, I can't be sure now."

Roland quickly understood the implication of Agatha's statement. "You've never seen this kind of ability before, have you?"

"No, many demons have similar capabilities and are able to affect their opponents with their eyes, such as Fearsome Demons. It's not a strange thing that a Senior Demon has this kind of ability. After all, unlike witches, whose ability types are determined during their awakening, demons can get new abilities by absorbing Magic Stones. However, I've never heard about such an ability, which could stop the wound from healing up." Agatha thought for a while. "If the feedback came from a small amount of magic power that the demon attached to the wound, everything would make sense."

"Indeed, that also explains why Nana's healing ability suddenly

became ineffective. She can heal wounds, but that doesn't necessarily mean that she's able to dispel a demon's evil power," Ronald thought and then asked, "Do you know how to remove this power from Lightning?"

"I don't know," the Ice Witch replied plainly. "Normally, a God's Stone of Retaliation can eliminate effects of the magic power, but this Senior Demon's power isn't that simple."

"Since it may work on the wound, how about we remove the wound and the flesh around it first and then heal the cut?"

"No, I suggest you don't do that. This small wound isn't deadly, but what if the demon's evil power can expand with the wound? In that case, the cut will still remain unhealed after the operation, and it'll be even more difficult for Lightning to recover," Agatha vetoed the suggestion immediately. "In the next few days, we'd better let her stay in the Third Border City and observe her changes. Pasha knows more than us. Maybe she can think of some way to dispel the demon's power."

"I see."

Roland nodded and slowly walked to the bed.

Seeing him, Lightning dropped her head and sounded as if she was about to cry. "Your Majesty, sorry...I'm..."

"You don't have to apologize." Roland touched her head. "Have a good rest. I promise I'll find a way to cure you."

Lightning sobbed and trembled, trying her best to hold back her tears. After a long time, she finally managed to squeak out a yes.

"Good."

...

Three days later, Taquila witches informed Roland of Lightning's recent situation.

Right after receiving the message, he went to the Third Border

City inside the North Slope Mountain together with Nightingale and Wendy.

Pasha received them at the entrance of the main hall.

"How's Lightning?"

"She feels much better now. Elena has been taking care of her these days. By telling the little girl her interesting experiences in the Dream World, she made her almost forget about her encounter with the Senior Demon," Pasha said with a smile. "Today, Lightning even flew a few circles in the main hall with Maggie. The small wound on her chest doesn't affect her actions at all."

Hearing that, Roland breathed a sigh of relief. At present, he still kept Lightning's injury as a secret, which was only known to a small number of witches. He had not even told Thunder about it, lest it caused stress and anxiety for him. However, he could not hide her forever since her disappearance would inevitably cause everyone to worry and bring even more attention to this matter.

"Have you figured out what the Senior Demon did to her?" Wendy asked anxiously.

Pasha waved her tentacles. "Celine has re-read all the literature left by Taquila but still can't find a record that matches her experience. Given that, we reckon that it must be a new ability of the demons. We've never seen this ability before but we've found some similar abilities. In fact, based on its effect, we think it resembles a very rare ability."

"What's that?"

"We call it the magic curse," Pasha replied in a measured but firm tone.

Chapter 1043: A New Challenge

"A curse?" Roland repeated the word in an ominous tone.

"Please come with me." Pasha turned around and led everyone into an adjacent cave, where the Taquila witches stored books and scrolls. They had gouged many grooves in the walls of the cave, and it seemed that this library cave had even more volumes than the Secret Temple's library. "Celine, His Majesty is here."

"I'm coming." Celine's voice rang in everyone's head before she came out. The next moment, her main tentacle stuck out from the depths of the cave, knocking lots of books off before quickly shrinking back into the darkness.

Before it retreated, it greeted Roland by giving him a nod.

"Ahem— I'm sorry, Your Majesty. Every time she spots a new study object, she'll get totally absorbed in the research like this," Pasha explained with a slight embarrassment. "The demon seemed to use a curse on Lightning, but she wasn't inflicted with any serious injury. That's indeed a rare thing."

"What's she going to do?" The moment Roland heard the phrase, "study object", he thought of mice used in experiments, who would suffer various unfair treatments in labs.

"Please rest assured. Observing and recording are the principal study methods we use in magic power research. With the help of the magic core, Celine can clearly capture the movement of Lightning's magic power," said Pasha while picking up the books that fell on the ground. She opened a book and showed it to everyone. "Look at this here... and here."

Roland reckoned that this book was probably an ancient book passed down from the Taquila age, since most of its pages had already turned yellow with age. It was written in the witch's ancient language. Next to the two parts pointed out by Parsha,

there was a note tucked inside the book, which explained the content of the ancient writings. Apparently, Celine had already translated these two parts for them.

He took a closer look and found that it was about two battles.

"In a siege battle in the Land of Dawn, eight wounded witches were rescued by the reinforcements, but in the end, none of them recovered from their injuries. Their wounds just could not heal no matter what. All treatments were ineffective on them. As time went by, they became weaker from loss of blood and their wounds got infected. They suffered a lot before death, and two of them even chose to commit suicide," Parsha said slowly. "This battle happened so long ago that even the writer of the book did not know many details about it, except that this was an incredible incident. The phrase 'the demon's magic curse' first appeared in this story."

"The other part where the magic curse is mentioned was in the records of a battle that happened not that long ago. A Senior Demon fought a fierce battle against the witches' army in Lakes City, which was situated on the edge of the Fertile Plains. It could attach its magic power to black stone spears. Once a witch was wounded by such a spear, she would become feeble and wither up. The Union called this cruel monster Dementor." Pasha paused a moment before adding, "It killed three Extraordinaries, and within all three Extraordinaries, the Quest Society found a strange magic power."

"And the strange magic power came from the demon, right?" Roland blurted out.

"Yes," Pasha nodded her main tentacle. "We think these abilities are of the same type. The strange magic power can somehow remain inside the target and cause continuous damage, which can't be cured by any conventional medical treatment. And it's also hard to eliminate the strange magic power."

"That's why you call it a curse," said Wendy, sadly. "It's terrible..."

Nightingale understood Pasha's implication and asked, "You said it's hard to eliminate it. Do you mean... there's still a way to erase it?"

Pasha turned to the next page and answered, "Yes, if what we've inferred from these records is correct."

Roland skimmed through the rest of the story. "When Lakes City was at stake, a witch named Samantha stood out to fight Dementor. In this battle, she went through a high awakening and became a Transcendent. After she cleaved the demon in half, the curse on her somehow disappeared and she miraculously survived. Samantha tried her best to defend Lakes City, but one year later, the city still fell, since the Red Mist was already too close to the city. Fortunately, she gained enough time for the people to withdraw from the city. After that, Samantha forced a radical change in the Union and successfully built the Three Chiefs system. She herself was among the first batch of Three Chiefs."

Now, Roland understood what Pasha meant.

If Lightning was really affected by the magic curse, the only way to save her was probably killing the demon who exerted this effect on her. It was not an easy thing. The previous battles in the snow mountain camp and in the Northbound Slope had already proven that Senior Demons were exceptionally difficult opponents. If they went head to head with the First Army, human beings would have a better chance of winning the battle. However, if they deliberately avoided head-on confrontations, it would be very difficult and risky to chase and fight them.

And this was virtually impossible for the witches in the Taquila age.

Senior Demons usually acted together with their armies. As military leaders, they were often surrounded by many demon

soldiers. Back then, it had been extremely difficult for the Taquila witches to win a battle against the demons, let alone completely annihilating the enemy soldiers and getting close to the Senior Demons.

Roland could not help thinking of the unknown witch and her last words in her letter to Natalia.

She probably also died from this kind of magic curse.

Since she had been able to write directly to one of the Three Chiefs, she must have been at the upper levels of the Union. But even she had not been able to do anything about the curse except accepting the final outcome of it.

To save such a cursed witch, the Union would have to find and kill the Senior Demon who had inflicted the curse upon her from amongst the numerous demons. During this process, they had to sacrifice even more witches. Apparently, for the Union, saving a cursed witch was not worth the risks and sacrifices.

Nightingale gradually clenched her hands into fists while weighing the gains against the losses.

After a moment of contemplating, Roland said, "Indeed, it's difficult to kill the demon, but I'll never give up any chance to cure Lightning."

"..." Pasha remained speechless for a moment. "If this is what you want."

"Before we take action, I need to sort some things out. The Senior Demon Lightning encountered has the ability to lay a curse upon anyone without direct contact. If it curses a common person, what will happen to that person?"

"The outcome will be even worse." Celine suddenly interrupted. "The magic power gives witches better immunity and greater healing abilities, so we won't be affected by the demonic plague, which was bacterial infections mentioned in your book. As for

common people, they'll quickly die from the infections since their wounds can't heal up."

"Can God's Stones of Retaliation protect them from the curse?"

"Of course, they can. If Dementor hadn't been a match for an Extraordinary in strength, it would've never caused such huge losses to the Union. However—" Celine paused a moment before continuing, "Based on Lightning's description, we cannot rule out the possibility that the demon she met is a Magic Slayer. If it is, wearing God's Stones of Retaliation won't be very helpful."

The more powerful a demon was, the more it would resemble a human being. This rule was verified by the Union in the previous two Battles of Divine Will.

Roland took a deep breath.

He had to agree with Celine on this point. According to Lightning's description, this Senior Demon might be stronger than all the enemies they have encountered in the past.

Given that, to kill the Senior Demon, he would have to plan the expedition to Taquila very carefully.

Chapter 1044: An Unsteady Mind

Lightning and Maggie slowly descended from the sky and landed on the roof of the Witch Building.

A cold wind was howling, but after they entered the building and closed the door, they could only hear a slight whistling noise caused by the wind blowing through the crack between the door and its frame.

"Whew, my hair is all wet." The pigeon shook off the snowflakes and began to transform back into a little girl. Her plumage swelled and then changed into ankle-length white hair. Her hair looked and felt very soft, but it would never get messed up in the wind. Now, it wrapped around the little girl, making her look like a cotton ball.

But since her hair was damp with the water from the snow, it looked bleak and was not as fluffy as usual.

"You'd better go to take a shower first, otherwise, you'll get a cold." Lightning took off her goggles and looked outside. The weather during the Months of Demons was extremely unpredictable. Not long ago, it had been just a light snow, but now, it had turned into a snowstorm. She had to suspend her recovery training in such a heavy snow.

"Aren't you coming with me?" asked Maggie, surprised

"His Majesty told me that I should try my best to keep the wound dry and avoid unboiled water. Do you remember?" Lightning shrugged. "So I'll just wipe myself with warm water. Besides, this coat is waterproof."

"I see." Maggie smoothed away the hair from her face and grinned. "After my shower, I can scrub your back. Ashes enjoyed it very much. And I don't even need a towel!"

"Uh... how did you scrub her back without a towel?"

"Like this." Maggie used her hands to grab some of her hair and made circular motions.

"No, thanks." Lightning rolled her eyes. "If you use a towel, I'll think about it. Go to take a shower now, Maggie."

"Oh!"

Maggie walked towards the castle with a basin balanced on her head. Lightning turned around and walked into her bedroom alone.

She locked the door and leaned against it.

She stretched out her right hand and found that she could not stop her fingers from trembling.

She smiled mirthlessly.

Every time she closed her eyes, she would see the demon charging towards her. Even after these last few days of training, this fear still followed her and it even seemed to take root in her heart. Lightning had never faced this kind of situation before.

When she was in front of Roland and her Exploration Group, she pretended that she was not affected by the small wound. Even Nightingale did not perceive anything wrong with her when she was discussing her injury with others. However, she could not lie to herself. She knew how miserable her current situation was.

As an ambitious explorer, she was afraid to let anyone see her being so weak. She was afraid that Maggie might notice something wrong with her, so she sent her to take a shower alone.

In the next moment, she gradually slid to the ground and buried her head in her knees.

Phyllis had told her that the Senior Demon might have just evoked a sense of fear in her by making eye contact with her like a Fearsome Demon would do to its opponent, but she did want to fool herself with such an excuse. It had happened long ago and a

witch should be good at resisting this kind of emotional influence. Back then, Maggie had been there too, but she had not been affected by the Senior Demon at all.

Lightning could accept the fact that she was terrified.

After all, this was not the first time for her to fear something.

People were naturally afraid of the unknown. No person was omniscient, so no one could avoid fear.

What counted was how a person responded to the fear.

Most of the time, such a feeling would never bother her too much. On the contrary, it would ignite her interest in challenging herself, since she wanted to prove that nothing in this world could really scare her.

But this time, however, she felt empty in her heart.

She was afraid to think about her encounter with the Senior Demon, not to mention overcoming the fear she felt.

In today's recovery training, she kept flying on the east side of Neverwinter and never dared to fly over the city wall. It was not because of health reasons but because of her fear of the vast snow field. For her, the white land below looked like bottomless cliffs and the horizon looked like a cleft which would swallow everything. Every time she looked into the distance, she would feel her heart trembling.

Before she got a chance to fight against the demon, she was already shocked by its strong evil spirit. It was like prey being terrified by a predator. This fear caused great harm to her and even affected her flying ability.

Lightning held her knees tightly.

I am such a coward! I'm not qualified to lead the Exploration Group.

She could not help wondering what her father would do to get rid

of such a fear. She believed that Thunder, who had explored many dangerous waters, must have been able to tackle this problem.

"Father..."

She whispered.

"What should I do now?"

A weapon test was about to begin in the Misty Forest.

The test location was Forest Station No.1, the starting point of the railway in the Barbarian Land

In the next year, when the steam locomotive was put into use, Neverwinter would better utilize the forest's resources, such as food and lumber, and would be able to exploit the coal mines near the snow mountain. At that time, this vast, trackless forest would become a real treasure trove.

But, for now, the railway only served one purpose.

It was dedicated to the war effort.

The First Army had already sealed off the station for the weapons test.

Iron Axe also attended this event.

He could not help thinking of the mind-blowing black powder trial blasting that occurred four years ago. Back then, when he had been a humble hunter, he had been deeply shocked by the explosion and had taken it as the Fire of God's Punishment. That trial was a revelation to him and had completely changed his fate.

Now, as the commander of the First Army, he actively participated in the weapons test. He had already known what His Majesty was going to test today before he even came here. Actually, it was more a creative combination than a brand new invention. It consisted of two parts: cannons and a train, both of which had been displayed before. Given that, he believed he would be able to

witness the whole test process peacefully this time.

He should remain calm the whole time.

As a high-ranking military official, he needed to look comfortable and in command even in front of thunder and fire, just like His Majesty.

However, Iron Axe was still stunned when the armored vehicle slowly pulled out of the garage.

Its appearance could hardly evoke the image of the train he had seen previously since it was completely covered by black steel plates, except for certain parts of its wheels. If it was looked at from the front, it was square and angular, with a cold, commanding force.

It looked fierce.

Anyone who saw it would immediately reach this conclusion.

In the past, Iron Axe had not quite understood why His Majesty often described a machine as an enchanting thing, but now, watching this armored train proceeding on the railway in the snow, he suddenly understood. White smoke kept billowing out from the funnel of the engine and then gently blew over the train, which had many orderly-arranged rivets on its surface.

The giant steel ship was already impressive enough, but even it could not compete with this armored train.

This was because it was more than just a vehicle.

It was a deadly weapon at the same time!

Chapter 1045: A Black River on the Plain

When the armored train stopped in front of the crowd, Iron Axe finally got a chance to take a closer look at it.

It had only five train cars, so it was much shorter than the first train he had seen during its debut. However, as it was armored with steel plates, it looked much bulkier than the first train. Its black opaque surface made it look like a crouching wild beast.

The first and the fifth cars were identical. Both of these steam locomotives had a rotatable machine gun on the top and many small holes in the steel plates for soldiers to observe and shoot.

Iron Axe began to imagine what would happen when demons charged toward this thing.

When spears rain on the steel plates, making successive clangs, the train still remains intact and keeps moving at a steady pace. At the same time, a dozen of guns starts to fire through the holes on its side, riddling the enemies with bullets.

Both demons and demonic beasts will find themselves in a passive position under heavy attack, but they have no countermeasures. This new weapon is like a moving city wall, protecting the soldiers inside all the time.

What a marvelous invention!

Meanwhile, the soldiers around the station also began to whisper excitedly.

None of them expected that this new weapon was going to bring them even more surprises.

The First Army had to drastically increase their firepower for the upcoming war since they planned to eliminate skeleton monsters and destroy the demons' outpost in the Taquila ruins. To achieve those goals, they needed large-caliber cannons.

Such weapons were installed in the second and the fourth cars.

They were 152mm Longsong Cannons, but according to the king, these two cannons were specially made. Their barrels were longer and their chambers were larger. Each cannon would take up the entire interior of a train car. Everyone could clearly see that neither the second nor the fourth cars had extra space even for a machine gun.

Each cannon had a protective case around its barrel, which was even wider than the car and could protect the artillery units from aerial attacks.

Iron Axe had to admit that this design guaranteed safety but at the same time, he worried that the protective cases might be too heavy for the train. He wondered whether the train could withstand the impact when the cannons were firing and rotating.

"Your Majesty." A soldier jogged all the way to the king and saluted. "Everything is ready. Please issue an order!"

"This armored train is not yet operational. Now, the Ministry of Industry is solely responsible for the operation and maintenance of this equipment." Roland shook his head smilingly. "Given that, you should report to the Minister of Industry. She's in charge of this weapon test today."

Iron Axe did not notice that the queen also attended the test until this moment. Different from the other witches, she dressed in work clothes. That was why he did not recognize her in the first place.

"Your, Your Highness..." The soldier saluted Anna and stuttered. "Everything is rea-ready..."

"I know," Anna replied calmly. "Let them start the test."

"Yes!" The soldier replied and then shouted toward the armored train. "Start the test!"

Everyone revealed an understanding smile to the soldier. Right

after he gave the instruction, a siren rang throughout the forest.

"Woo—Woo—"

Iron Axe immediately returned his gaze to the train and heard some creaking noise made by a capstan. The next moment, he was amazed to find that the train somehow transformed.

The steel plates on both sides of the second and the fourth cars suddenly expanded and stretched out like two sturdy iron legs. Iron Axe had thought they were just protective plates, but now he realized that they were some supporting devices. On the end of each iron leg, there was a flat iron plate. These flat plates were like feet of the train. When they stepped in the snow, the cars were held firmly in position. From a distance, it looked like a giant spider with long legs.

Iron Axe was stunned. This... looks just like the deformed creature created by the demons!

Did His Majesty get inspired by the demons' creation and adopt their design?

Different from the demons' deformed creatures, this metal thing did not look evil. When all its legs were put in place, the fierce cannon opened fire for the first time.

Although the recoil was very strong, the black armored train remained motionless during the whole process, as if it had been fixed on the ground.

...

"It works." Roland took out his earplugs and nodded at Anna.

Although this was the first test of the armored train, he was not surprised by the success at all, since each equipment on this train had been tested many times.

Compared to the firearms and the train, he was delighted to see the iron legs more.

They were the first batch of hydraulic equipment manufactured by Neverwinter.

According to Pascal's principle, a pressure change occurring anywhere in a confined incompressible fluid will be transmitted undiminished to all points in the fluid. Given that, applying a little pressure on the smaller end of a sealed U-tube, which is filled with such fluid, will exert a much greater pressure against the entire area of the larger end of the tube. This principle can be applied widely, such as hydraulic jacks and hydraulic machinery.

Producing such hydraulic equipment required precision manufacturing and sealing technologies, both of which were no longer a problem for Neverwinter.

An electro-hydraulic support system was installed in this armored train.

Apart from the two cannon cars and the two steam locomotives, there was a bigger train car in the middle. It carried ammunition and a Dawn I, which could power everything in this train, such as electric bulbs and hydraulic pumps.

In Roland's design, the five above-mentioned cars would form a basically equipped armored train.

The train had a locomotive at both of its ends. When one locomotive was pulling the train forward, another one could push the train from behind. Given that, a basic five-car train could travel at more than 40 kilometers an hour. When he did not need speed, he could connect more cars to the train to carry soldiers or to further enhance its firepower. Different train cars could be combined according to the demand, which was an inestimable advantage of this train.

When everyone else was marveling at the armored train, Edith stepped out of the crowd and walked toward Roland smilingly.

"With this train, our plan to conquer Taquila will be successfully

carried out," She bowed to the king and said. "Your Majesty, may I ask, does it have a name?"

Roland thought for a moment and replied, "Let's call it the Blackriver."

"Black River?" Edith's eyes shone with excitement. "It sounds like a counterpart of the demons' red lines."

Roland felt his lips curling into a smile. "...You're so brilliant, the Pearl of the Northern Region. That's right."

The red lines, namely, the red mist supply lines, were demons' lifeblood. In areas which were not shrouded in the Red Mist, they had to build numerous red lines across the land to transport the Red Mist. In the past, the extension of red lines had been a severe problem for the Union, but now, a black line appeared on the Fertile Plains.

Black armored trains were going to carry numerous soldiers and ammunition deep into the vast Barbarian Land. This black river of trains would become a lifeline for mankind.

Chapter 1046: A New Recruitment Notice

"Thump, thump, thump."

Uncle Bucky and Sanko, who lived next door, came to Good's mud hut at dawn and knocked on the door.

"Good, did you get up? We should go!"

"I'll be ready in a moment!"

Good gobbled down his porridge and wiped his mouth. "I've got to get going," he said to a girl who was busy making the bed.

She looked up and asked, "Why don't you want me to go with you?"

"I've told you many times. You're too young to have a job here," Good said impatiently. "Stop talking about how you worked back in the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Do you still want to do those kinds of things? Stay at the house and I'll bring you something delicious for lunch."

The girl's eyes shone with excitement. "Popcorn—"

"It's too expensive. I think an egg pancake is tasty enough or are you saying you don't like the taste of a nice pan fried runny egg?"

The girl felt her mouth watering.

"So just stay at the house, do you understand?" Before leaving the hut, Good asked the girl, "What's your name now?"

"Rachel."

"And what should you call me?"

She replied after a little hesitance, "Bro-Brother."

"Very well, don't forget it." Good wrapped a linen cloth around his neck and pushed the door open. A cold wind blew across his face. It was a freezing cold morning, but the temporary residential area was already full of vigor and vitality.

Rows of mud huts stretched throughout the snowfield like rolling waves. Wisps of smoke continuously rose from the huts and people were busy with all kinds of preparations. Through the smoke, he could just make out the vague shape of the city on the other side of the river. When the temporary residential area began to hum, the city was still so quiet that it seemed as if it was sleeping.

Uncle Bucky and Sanko, who stood a few dozen paces away from Good, yelled, "What're you looking at? Come on!"

"I'm coming!" He closed the door of his hut and ran towards them.

A new stone road along the Redwater River had been opened to traffic recently. Now, people from the temporary residential area only needed 15 minutes to walk to downtown Neverwinter, which was about 2,000 meters away. This was different from taking a mountain path covered by snow as they did not need to take cautious steps walking on this road in the winter. But since Good and his neighbors wanted to get to the central square before the release of the new recruitment notice, they still set off early.

Soon, they picked up many companions along the way. These people were also immigrants living in the temporary residential area. This area was so large that Good could never see the end of it. According to his neighbor, these mud huts for immigrants used to be built inside the city, but, after a while, the city had not been able to accommodate all the new comers and had decided to move all the mud huts to this area. Every year, the government would build new huts for the new immigrants, so no one knew exactly how many immigrants lived here at the moment.

The only thing that Good knew for certain was that most of the people on this road were heading for the central square, wanting to find jobs.

"Have you thought about what kind of job you want?" asked Uncle Bucky.

"I want an easy, simple job, such as the snow sweeping and the de-icing job..." Sanko replied while rubbing his head. "I prefer to make some quick cash to support myself this winter, so I like part-time jobs. If I get that kind of job, the money that I earn in a day can buy enough food for two days. Of course, I'll also consider some other jobs if there are suitable positions in the special recruitment program."

The special recruitment programs usually offered better pay and had specific prerequisites. Actually, the city was full of various kinds of prerequisites, all job recruitment notices were issued by the Administrative Office instead of some individual. Every week, the office would update the notice and it would include hundreds of positions. Good was really impressed by their efficiency.

But compared to the other fascinating things in this city, these timely and detailed recruitment notices were nothing.

There were three kinds of recruitment programs: the special recruitment program, part-time job recruitment and full-time job recruitment. A full-time job could provide higher pay and a more promising future, but an immigrant, who did not have an ID card or a diploma in primary education, was not eligible to apply for these kinds of jobs. Most newcomers could only choose to take part-time jobs to support themselves.

Sanko was taking elementary education classes at night. If he passed the assessment, he would be able to become an official resident and get an ID card. Given his situation, he intended to find a part-time job. It did not pay well, but it would not take up too much of his time. .

"What about you?" Sanko looked at Good.

"I need a well-paid job." Good shrugged. "I don't mind hard work."

Good needed to support Rachel.

They had come to the city during this winter. They already felt lucky enough to have a mud hut. For them, it was still too much to hope for a nice residence or eating one meat-based meal every week.

The only thing that disappointed Good was that Rachel was only 14 and did not meet the minimum working age requirement of 16. But since they had exerted a great deal effort to get out of a difficult situation, he did not want her to lead a hard life anymore.

"Don't get too tired," Uncle Bucky said. "It's easy to get sick during the winter. Medical treatment is expensive."

"Relax, I'm in good health!" Good patted his chest. He was not bragging. If it had not been for his humble origins, he would have become a squire to a knight a long time ago. "What are you going to do, Uncle?"

"I just came to accompany you guys."

"What?" Sanko was startled.

Good quickly thought of something. "Did you already..."

"Aha, that's it." Uncle Bucky laughed out. "The foreman of the sixth engineering team has agreed to hire me. The contract will be delivered to me in two days."

"That's really... awesome!" Sanko exclaimed. "It's a full-time job. Your salary will be doubled! And soon you'll have enough money to pay the down payment. After that, you'll become an official resident of Neverwinter and get your ID card!"

"Yeah, that's the only way for me to get an ID. I'm too old to learn how to read and write." Bucky waved his hand. "And I've been here for almost two years before I got this chance. I can only say that I'm too stupid. In this city, you young guys will get many more opportunities than me."

Some people around them heard their conversation and came over to congratulate Uncle Bucky as he was going to become a

subject of the king very soon.

Good felt a little confused seeing this.

In his opinion, obtaining an ID card was just a way to find a better job, but these people seemed to care more about the identity than the job. It sounded as if all of them thought it was a great honor to become a subject of His Majesty.

They chatted all the way to the central square.

A group of people had already gathered in the square, but most of them were residents of the city and they didn't usually compete with immigrants for jobs.

A new recruitment notice was put up in the south side of the square. Every now and then, a child would come to them and ask, "Do you need me to read the notice to you? Only ten bronze royals."

"No, thanks. We can read," Bucky replied with a smile. In fact, among the three men, only Sanko had learned how to read and write, but even he still had a hard time reading.

"Why are these guys peddling in this place? They can read, so they should be able to get real jobs," Good mumbled. "They can earn much more by doing that."

"They must be students from the school that haven't reached the working age." Sanko looked around and explained.

"What?"

"Yeah, I've heard about it in my night class." Sanko lowered his voice. "To show the students the importance of knowledge, the teachers often encourage them to use what they've learned to make money. By doing so, the teachers attract even more students to the school. I also want to try when I don't have to work in the daytime."

"Ugh... if this is okay, maybe I should let Rachel come here to

make some money. She can read," Good thought while glancing at the children.

"Hey, look there!" Uncle Bucky suddenly pointed to the southern tip of the square. "There are a lot of people!"

"Is it a special recruitment program?" Good exchanged a knowing look with Sanko.

"Hurry up. Let's go there to have a look!"

The three men immediately ran to the southern side of the square. There was a person with a tent behind him, who came to explain the program to everyone.

Good felt thrilled after hearing the person describe the program.

It was indeed a special recruitment program and it seemed to be unprecedentedly easy. It did not require a diploma or an ID. It only needed men in good health, who could pass a series of assessments. The names of the assessments sounded so strange that Good could not understand any of them, but he was confident that he could meet any physical fitness requirement.

The most surprising fact about this program was that it was actually a military recruitment.

Chapter 1047: Tests

A noise came from the crowd.

The army had always recruited soldiers from the official residents, and the qualification requirement had steadily become increasingly tighter. The last open recruitment to all the residents was carried out during the fight for the throne. Why did Roland suddenly do it again?

Even the new immigrant Good had heard from his uncle about the favorable treatment given towards those in the army.

If he could get enrolled into the First Army, he wouldn't have to worry about his livelihood anymore—not only were food and clothing supplied by the army, his family could also get the benefit of a sum of pension if he were to, unfortunately, pass away. And the food served to the soldiers consisted of not only oatmeal and pancakes, but other rare food like fillet, jerky, and butter would be served without limitation! Except for the disadvantage that one might lose their lives in the line of duty, it could actually count as a perfect job.

No, it is a perfect job!

If I could get so much, isn't it already worth more than the value of my life?

During his exile from the Kingdom of Wolfheart to Graycastle, Good had witnessed far too much suffering and adversity: whole groups of people fell dead on the roadside just like animals; crows danced on the bodies happily, enjoying their rich meals... Sometimes, a human life wasn't even worth as much as the grass growing by the roadside.

Besides, even the Church of Hermes, which had once conquered the greater half of the Kingdom of Wolfheart, was defeated by the King of Graycastle. If he could join this powerful and mysterious

army, it might be safer than being a squire under a knight.

It was also not a bad choice to join the Second Army. Although the overall conditions might be a little poorer than that in the First Army, and he might be dispatched to another city, at least it was much safer, since he had not heard of the Second Army being involved in any major battles.

In other words, if he could join an army, no matter which one it was, it would become the best path forward for an immigrant like him.

Good and Sanko were both excited. They looked at Bucky and said, "Uncle!"

Bucky hesitated. He pondered over it for a while and said with a bitter smile, "I think I'd better not go... In order to hire me, I guess the foreman must have had to go to a fair amount of extra effort. I shouldn't break my agreement with him."

"Today is only for signing up our names. It doesn't mean we'll pass." Sanko tried to persuade Baji, "You can decide when the result comes out."

"Perhaps then I won't have enough willpower to refuse." Bucky shook his head. "Go ahead. I'll wait for good news from you in the square."

Sanko wanted to say more, yet was held back by the shoulder by Good. "Let's join in the queue."

Sanko looked back and finally nodded. "Let's go to apply first."

A lot of the applicants could neither read nor write, which made the situation a bit chaotic. Those who finished signing up were taken to another location by the black-uniformed guards, to be separated from the crowd. After hearing the news, more and more city residents came to sign up. The swarming applicants almost flooded the corner of the square. The organizer finally had to close the passage to the registry and announce that the recruitment

would continue the next day. Even then, it took a long time for the crowd to disperse. Many remained around the tent as they wanted to see how the test would be carried out.

Good could not help but feel lucky for arriving early for the registration.

On the other side of the registration desk, a few more candidates came into the tent under the guidance of the guards.

Good noticed that even though the tent was almost 100 steps long and wide, which was big enough to take in almost all the applicants, not more than 10 applicants were allowed to step in at one time. It meant that the test might be much more complicated and difficult than he had imagined.

Sure enough, not long after, shrill cries came out of the tent. Hearing that, the facial expression of the applicants waiting outside of the tent turned solemn.

"This..." Sanko shrank his neck and said, "This isn't a test to see how many beatings we can endure, is it?"

"If they were being beaten, the cries should be repeated at regular intervals," Good said in a low voice. "Since these cries are random and sporadic, I guess they were only frightened."

"Is, is it? You seem to be familiar with this..."

"That's because I'm experienced at both beating and being beaten." Good sighed slightly. "I've only heard of it from others."

After a while, the sound of someone vomiting could be heard.

The crowd's faces turned ghastly pale.

"What is this test about?"

"Um..." Good went into silence. "It would be a miracle if I knew what it's about."

When the first batch of testees was finally brought out, Good was startled. "Only one of the 10 is left inside, which means the failure

rate is 90%? Besides, why do they all look so weak, as if they can't even stand still? Judging from their figures, they should be physically strong."

Yet there was no time left for him to wonder why it was like that.

A guard called out his name, "Good!"

"Yes!" Good clenched his fists and strode inside the tent.

The space inside wasn't too big, and it seemed to have been divided into several areas using curtains. According to their sequence of walking in, the line of testees sat in order in front of a man in a military uniform. The stools they sat on were a little strange, as if they were designed to make people uncomfortable, because people had to stand on tiptoes in order to sit on it. To Good's relief, Sanko was in the same batch as him.

"I'm in charge of this test," the man in uniform said. "You don't need to know my name because most of you will soon be weeded out. Even if you're lucky enough to pass this test, it's merely the first step. In order to join the army, you still have much more to learn."

"Is this a recruitment for the Second Army... or for a reserve which is newer than the Second Army?" Good thought to himself. "Whatever it is, as long as the payment is enough to offer Rachel and me a better life, I'm going to try it."

"Here are the rules," the guy in uniform said. "All of you put your feet on the footboard and keep that posture for five minutes. No matter what you see, you're to stay on the stool. Of course, if your feet touch the ground, it also means you fail the test. Now prepare to start."

The testees looked at one another. "So simple?"

The officer sneered. Without replying, he pulled aside the curtains around them.

Suddenly a streak of bizarre white light overwhelmed Good.

When he came back to himself, he found that he was floating high in the middle of the sky.

"Ah——ah——"

Shrill cries sounded again, and at the same time some toneless thuds were heard. It aroused a burst of panic. Subconsciously, Good wanted to struggle with his limbs, in the vain attempt to escape from being smashed into pieces, but the slight touch of shivering under his butt immediately brought him back to reality.

He was still sitting on the stool!

But what followed was even more terrible.

He did not keep floating for much longer. Soon the surrounding clouds began to rise, which meant he was falling—the sensation that the rapid fall brought to him was beyond description. Good felt his heart almost rise to his throat. His brain warned him of extreme danger, yet his reason told him that under his butt was an invisible stool! Under these two contradicting thoughts, Rachel's face appeared in his head eventually...

...

The white light disappeared, and what appeared in his field of view was the tent again.

"Not bad." The officer clapped his hands. "You've passed the first test, and your performance was much better than the previous batch. Anyway, there are still several tests awaiting you. I hope you can stick to the end."

Is this only... the first test?

Good swallowed his own saliva. He found that his hands were trembling heavily and his back was icy cold. It was like he just got out of a pool of water.

Damn it!

That fall was not the end. Afterward, through his view, he saw

himself climbing a few more times, and he even skimmed over steep cliffs along mountain ridges. He felt that he might crash onto the rocks at any time!

"Simple?" Good remembered the sneer on the officer's face when he entered the tent... "No, God must have blessed me for me to still be sitting on the stool at that moment!"

Good tilted his head and looked both sides—half of the stools were empty and Sanko was nowhere to be found.

Chapter 1048: The Surprising Presiding Officer

Has he fallen on the ground out of fear or was he hit off the stool by somebody else?

Being disoriented, one could hit somebody off the stool in panic. After all, they were not very spread out. To sit still on the stool until the end required a little bit of luck too.

Good did not know whether to celebrate or be disappointed—of course, the fewer competitors, the better chance he could win, but he had to take the following tests without Sanko. Before he could think more about it, he was taken to an adjacent compartment.

The space for the second test was not big either. Again, 10 chairs were put in the center of the room, yet their arrangement was different.

They were arranged in a circle and were combined together with an iron ring. Under the iron ring, there was a support to enable the ring to rotate freely.

"Sit according to your arrangement." The tester said coldly. "The rules for the second test are the same as the first one. Sit steadily, stick to the end."

Nobody dared to call it "simple" this time.

Everybody climbed carefully onto the iron ring and sat on their chair in accordance with the arrangement.

As the officer ordered to begin, the two guards came forward, grabbed the handles behind the chairs, and pushed to rotate the iron ring—as Good had expected, the chairs began to rotate.

At first, the testees did not respond much. With the acceleration of the rotation, they began to feel discomfort.

Yet, the soldiers did not intend to stop. Under the order of the

presiding officer, they exerted more effort at pushing the ring. Immediately, the tent was filled with the creaking sounds of the chairs. Good's vision became more and more blurry.

The sky and earth are spinning round!

That was the only sensation left in his head.

Good has not fully recovered from the influence brought by the first phantom; the intense dizziness brought by the second phantom heavily turned his stomach, which almost drove the acid water to his tongue.

What kind of test is this? Is the army recruiting monsters?

Good clenched his teeth and tried to look at those soldiers as a diversion, but he found that the soldiers were looking up at the roof of the tent to avoid directly looking at the iron ring while their hands were only repeating the simple pushing move, not being affected by the rotation at all.

This, this isn't fair!

Good cried silently. The officer only told them to stick to the end, yet he did not tell them when the end was. "What if the rotation lasts for an hour? I will probably pass out in this chair!"

His attempt to focus his eyesight aggravated his dizziness. Not being able to hold the acid water in his stomach any longer, Good gushed it out!

"Ou——!"

The sour stench suddenly rushed into his nostrils.

Like a chain reaction, his vomiting led to the others vomiting too. Immediately, the smell in the tent became extremely horrible. Some flying fluid and half-digested food even stuck on Good's face.

"I, I can't take it anymore!"

"Stop, stop it! Ou—I'm done!"

Good finally understood why they had heard the vomiting sounds outside the tent.

This is too harsh. More importantly, what's the point of this test? Is this really a recruitment for the army, other than a hoax to torture us on purpose?

Every second was a torture. Good felt like giving up at any moment, yet he did not loosen up his grab on the back of the chair until the iron ring stopped rotating.

Three testees were left.

The officer showed a rare expression of praise. "Well done. Now you're one step closer to being qualified. Rest for five minutes. From the second test on, the test difficulty will decrease. Just treat them seriously and you'll be fine."

However, at that moment, the testees stopped trusting the tester. They were prepared for any eventualities. Casually wiping their faces with sleeves, they solemnly walked into the next compartment.

To his surprise, Good found the officer had not lied.

The third test required the testees to go into a hollow ring and roll to the other end of the tent on all fours.

Nobody was weeded out.

The fourth test required them to browse a set of weird pictures filled with lumps of similar colors and point out the hidden animal patterns.

Again, everybody passed.

Yet the doubt in Good's heart grew stronger and stronger.

The fifth test required a nude check-up. The sixth test required them to point out the directions of the arrows on a luminous glass.

Although everybody performed differently, the result came out fine.

While Good and another two testees were waiting for the following test, the officer took them out of the tent. Good found another smaller tent to the back door of the big tent. Black-uniformed guards closely surrounded that area. It seems that somebody important is inside.

"Sir, are we...?" someone could not help asking.

The officer smiled. "Forgot to congratulate you. The tests are over. You've all passed the preliminary filter. Just wait here. You'll be received later."

"Is this only the preliminary filter? About the treatment mention on the notice—" Good suddenly stopped in the middle of his questioning. "Damn it. The army would certainly not welcome those who came for the treatment, much like those knights who keep on mentioning honors. Since I asked about the treatment so hurriedly, the officer will most likely take me as a greedy person."

Despite that, the officer did not show any sign of dissatisfaction. Instead, he carefully looked at Good and asked, "Are you in serious need of money?"

"I..."

"It's nothing. After all, the high treatment of the First Army is well-known in Neverwinter. Actually, that was also my original intention of joining the army." The officer shrugged and said, "The answer is yes. The education subsidies, living allowances, and payment mentioned on the notice will all be realized in full. The following tests are to decide how far you can go, other than offer excuses to cut your welfares. As I said, in order to become a real soldier, you still have much more to learn."

Good was instantly overwhelmed by a huge sense of happiness. "Am, am I chosen, with a payment more than that of uncle Bucky, subsidies enough to support Rachel and me? All of that has become true?" Immediately, he felt what he suffered inside the tent was nothing. While thinking back, he even tasted a hint of sweetness.

"Thank, thank you Sir—" Good hurriedly bowed with excitement.
"I'll do my best to join the First Army as soon as possible."

The other two testees were also very excited and bowed following Good's example.

"But there is one thing I want to tell you. Indeed, a lot of people join the army for the high treatment, yet what made them stay isn't the pay." The officer smiled carelessly. "In the army, there are things much more worth pursuing. One day, you'll find that what you pursued in the beginning wouldn't even be worth mentioning in comparison." He paused slightly as if thinking of something worth remembering. "Alright, there are still many waiting to be tested. See you another time."

It turns out that the other party is not an indifferent, silent and ruthless person.

Good was a little startled. "Sir, since we've passed the tests, may we know your name now?"

"I'm Van'er."

Then the officer went back to the big tent.

...

Afterward, other qualified testees were gradually coming out of the big tent and joining Good in the queue.

The recruitment had not come to an end until the late afternoon.

After calculating, Good found that 16 "preliminary soldiers" were filtered on the first day.

The guards came over, sandwiched them in the middle and escorted them to the last tent.

The furnishing inside was quite simple—there was nothing except for a long desk. Good found that the guards appeared very nervous and that the other testees beside him were breathing heavily.

"Oh? Are those the knight candidates they selected?" A tall man standing beside the desk looked at them up and down with a keen interest, as his eyes showed that he meant to survey the testees.

Good was startled. What did he say? Knights?

Could it be that what the First Army recruited are knights?

How can this be possible?

That's a title only the descendants of the nobles could have.

With my status, I can't even be chosen as a squire!

"Air knights? I'm sure it's a title my elder brother came up with." A euphonic female voice sounded. "They're far from getting there. Take it easy. Right, all of you go to the sides and leave the central space empty for them."

"But..." the leading guard said hesitantly.

"It's alright. Someone behind me is protecting me."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Your...Highness?

Before he could figure out what was happening, Good saw the people in front of him moving away and a girl with astonishingly beautiful appearance showed. Her eyes were as bright as gemstones and her face was even more innocent than white snow. Anyone who laid their eyes on her would not forget her. If possible, Good wished he could just gaze at her from then on.

Still, he forced himself to look away and bow down respectfully.

Her beautiful long gray hair indicated her identity.

Even as a new immigrant, Good knew what that hair color stood for.

It was the symbol of the Graycastle royal family.

In Neverwinter, there was only one girl who was of this descent.

She was His Majesty Roland's sister, Tilly Wimbledon.

"Respects to Your Highness!"

Everybody knelt down orderly.

Chapter 1049: The Princess's Reward

"Rise," Tilly said placidly. "I know that you must be puzzled at this moment. Why does the military recruit unofficial residents? Why are the screening conditions so weird? And... why do I explain these to you? In fact, these issues are hard to explain, but you'll find them easy after you experience them in person. Therefore, I won't elaborate here. I'll simply mention a few points."

"First of all, you're joining neither the First Army nor the Second Army. It's a new army that my brother intends to establish. It's different from any other army, so the screening will also be more special."

Her words caused a stir among the crowd. Undoubtedly, the new army offered a wider promotion route and it was less likely for them to be marginalized. For those who had no background at all, it was obviously the best choice to develop in a brand-new army.

Even a fool could realize it.

"But you can only be counted as reserve members now," the princess continued. "It's so different that I don't have any reference. This means that everything must be started from scratch, and the difficulties will definitely be beyond imagination. Compared with it, what you encountered earlier is nothing. There are 16 people here, but, I'm afraid that only one or two, or none of you can become the Aerial Knight."

Good could not help gasping at her words.

What surprised him was not how difficult it was, but the first half of her words.

It was indeed a knight!

Although he did not know the difference between the "Aerial Knight" and the traditional knight, it was inconceivable that

ordinary people from poor families could get this opportunity.

As for its difficulty?

That is only natural!

He felt his heart started to burn.

He was even more shocked at what she said next—

"In addition, in this city... no, in the world, only my brother and I truly understand what the new army is, but the king is too busy to put too much energy in it. Therefore, I'll be responsible for teaching you in the future."

Her words struck Good like a thunder.

Her Royal Highness would personally teach them?

In other words, they would have the opportunity to become the knights conferred by the Graycastle Princess?

Even if they would not be conferred with domain and noble title, it was still a great honor, especially for new migrants like him who had nothing.

Others also could not calm down.

If it was not for fear of being rude to the princess, they would have surely cheered long ago.

The best evidence was the rapid breathing around him.

"All qualified trainees will be trained together in the Shallow Beach New District. You'll get new residences and official identities, and become a member of the new king's city from then on." Tilly stretched out her hand and pressed down, "Remember, though you're just trainees, you're also a member of the army. Your actions will be restricted. If you quit halfway, it'll be regarded as defection. Any violation of military orders will result in severe punishment. Do you understand?"

"Yes... Your Highness!" Although they were shocked by the

princess' solemn warning and their answers were not loud, no one showed their regret.

"Very good. Finally, take an oath to the King of Graycastle." Tilly turned to the tall man at the table, "Vader."

The latter nodded his head while pressing his chest and then took out a sheet of white paper from his pocket, "Now repeat every word I say."

The content of the oath was very easy to understand.

Even too straightforward.

For example, "I will never be disloyal to King Roland and I have no hostility to the witches."

Who dares !

Thinking that Her Highness was also said to be a witch, Good unconsciously raised his voice to the maximum as if that could show his loyalty.

After the oath was completed, the guards stepped forward and distributed packages to their hands.

"From this moment on, you are a member of the army." Tilly smiled, "The first round of recruitment is expected to last for a week or so, and then the training will officially begin. The things in the package are my personal reward and also what you must master."

...

When Good returned to the Central Square, it was already dark, and most of the people who had come to the recruitment had long left. Uncle Bucky and Sanko also disappeared.

This was not unexpected. No one had thought that the assessment would take such a long time. They had to take care of their family, so they could not stay on the square for a long time.

At the moment, he couldn't care much. He held the package

tightly in his arms and rushed toward the temporary residential area.

He was filled with joy and felt that he was full of power. He did not feel any coldness even in the cold wind. The snow under his feet cracked and the road trodden by the passersby was like a dark-brown beacon. It might be covered by white snow tomorrow, but for now, it guided him back home.

He walked into the low but warm mud hut and found that Rachel was cooking oatmeal.

"Sorry... I came back late, today—"

"I know," the girl interrupted lively. "Uncle Bucky next door had already told me. You found a good job, right?"

Without waiting for him to answer, she extended her right hand to him.

"Where is the tasty food?"

"Er... What?"

"Hey, you promised that you would bring me a chicken pancake!" Rachel curled her mouth in dissatisfaction.

Hell, he actually forgot the whole thing. He quickly promised her, "Next time, you can eat one pancake every week! No, two!"

"Two?" Rachel asked doubtfully, "Really?"

"Of course, it's not an ordinary job. I have seen Her Highness!" Good took off his wet shoes, rolled up half of the trouser legs, sat down by the fire before he carefully took the package out from his pocket. "Look. This is what she gave to me."

"What's inside?" The girl's curiosity overwhelmed her dissatisfaction.

"I don't know, either. Let's open it, " said Good, unfolding the package. He was a little shocked and said, "This is..."

"A book?" Rachel said.

He took all the things out and found that it was a pile of books. Each cover was printed with different pictures and it looked very delicate. Unfortunately, he could not understand a single word.

"Can you...help me read it?" At this time, he could only ask for Rachel's help.

The girl smiled proudly, "I can't guarantee that I'll recognize all of them. Em, this is Reading and... Writing Skills, and that one is Common ... Quick ... Vocab, and the third is..."

Were these things what Sanko learned? The picture on the cover turned out to be a summary of the content. For example, a quill was printed on Reading and Writing Skills , and stereoscopic letters of all sizes on Quick Vocab ...

Somehow, Good was slightly disappointed.

He had thought that it would be a reward from Her Highness to the qualified person. It did not have to be valuable. Even a scroll or a document would at least be a symbol of honor.

If it were known by other people, they would definitely begin to laugh at him for daydreaming. How could Her Highness put the primary education textbooks which could be seen everywhere into his hands as a reward?

However, Good soon recovered.

That was right. Since he wanted to be a knight, naturally he could not be illiterate.

He indeed had many things to learn.

Just then, the cover of a book attracted Good.

He had never seen the thing in the picture before, which was like a huge kite and a large bird flying high. It had two pairs of wings many times larger than a man, and the woman sitting on it was like the Princess. The sea sparkled under her feet and the

continent, which was supposed to be vast, became a small slice.

This perspective was exactly what he had seen in the first round of assessments!

He could not help holding his breath.

"Rachel... What's written in this book?"

"Oh, let me see," Rachel approached and said, "Flight... and Operation... Uh, that's right!" She clapped her hands and read it again, "It's called Flight Principle and Operation Manual. "

Chapter 1050: A Difficult Puzzle

A week later, Tilly put the list of the names on Roland's office desk.

"How was the recruitment? Did it go well?" Roland poured a cup of tea for her and asked carefully. He has always felt a lingering sense of guilt when facing this nominal "sister" of his. Except for Anna to whom he told the truth on his own initiative, Tilly was the first one to discover that he was not Prince Roland. When the flying demons attacked Neverwinter, Tilly's protective actions made him realize that she had completely accepted their alliance but the guilt in his heart has not relieved at all.

After all, it was he who occupied the body of Prince Roland.

At the very beginning, he had planned to occupy the identity of her brother without giving any explanation. However, when he found out that she did not blame him, he, instead, became uncomfortable.

Of course, he just kept that in his mind, but would not repeatedly mention it. Most of those people who insisted on getting an answer would die for it, which he knew well.

"It went well, except for the number of the trainees." Tilly took the teacup and blew lightly before drinking it, "I selected 124 people from the migrants, and 73 from official citizens. Less than 200 people... I'm afraid such a small group of people may have little impact in our fight against the demons."

"It's always difficult to start," Roland read the list. "After you set examples, you'll surely attract more people in the second round of recruitment. Then it won't be limited to Neverwinter."

Though different people had different visions, humankind's longing for the vast space was engraved in the bones. From the moment the civilization was born, people had begun to look up at

the starry sky. Whether it was imitating the birds or making balloons, the exploration of the sky was not unique in the era of aircraft. The explorers from the Society of Wondrous Crafts were the best example. Therefore, Roland was not worried about the attraction of Air Force to people.

The first thing to do was to cultivate a team that could fly.

Anyhow, he knew that training of pilots was by no means an easy task.

In an era when the flight control system was still immature, the most important quality of a pilot was... talent. No fear of height, resistance to dizziness, and physical coordination were just basic requirements. The sense of spatial orientation, understanding of the plane, and even the reaction speed all determined whether a person was qualified to be a pilot.

The obedience and reliability of the veterans of the First Army were extremely high. It was okay to select a few outstanding soldiers as core military officers, but it was impossible to transfer all of them into the Air Force.

This was why he decided to select from the new migrants.

Knowledge could be acquired by learning, but the talent was inherent. It would be better to find more qualified people than forcing those who were not.

According to the report, nearly 3,000 people signed up within a week and nearly 200 of them were qualified. From this point of view, it was indeed a wise move to include temporary residents from the very beginning.

Turning to the last page of the name list, Roland was surprised and asked, "Six people failed to pass the oath part?"

"Their thoughts were different from the things they said, so they were taken by Vader to interrogate," Nightingale answered. "Two of them were official citizens of Neverwinter."

Roland frowned. In theory, this was not something worth a fuss. People's fickleness was ordinary, and it took an instant to change from good to evil. He had never expected those people would remain the same forever. Yet, when he really encountered it, he still felt a sense of disappointment.

They could have followed him into a better new era.

They had even seen the threshold of the new era.

In spite of that, they gave up in front of the threshold.

"Did you find out the reason?"

"I have planned to report to you after doing a thorough investigation,", said Nightingale carelessly. "They were bought by a foreign tradesman, hoping to infiltrate into the army so as to get more information about the firearms. The police department acted but only caught the tradesman's assistants who stayed in the hotel. Then I asked Summer to create flashbacks and discovered a letter from the old king's city. From the content, the mastermind behind it seemed to be a nobleman. Anyway, we have known his whereabouts, appearance, and identity, and his portrait painted by Soraya was sent to Theo by the Animal Messenger. I think he won't be able to escape for a long time."

Hearing this, Roland could not help laughing, and the previous unpleasantness was driven away. In the face of such an unreasonable investigation model, the revolters were really miserable.

"Er... what's the problem?" Nightingale blinked.

"No, you did a good job," Roland pressed down his smile. "Since they are reluctant to give up, the North Slope Mine area still needs more hands."

It seemed the former nobles did not completely give up. As long as they found any chance, they would try to recover the noble system. He was not surprised by it. After all, the feudal system had

lasted for nearly 1,000 years and still existed in the other three kingdoms. It was impossible to make it disappear overnight.

"Well," Tilly cleared her throat, changing the subject back to business. "The problem of trainees is solved. Where is the plane?"

"Well... By the way, Evelyn has recently made a type of Chaos Drinks with excellent taste. Do you want to have a try?"

"Oh? Great—no!" Tilly soon recovered, "We're talking about the plane. You haven't even made a prototype plane, have you?"

Bingo!

"Anyway, they have to start from learning to read and mastering basic theory. If it's just for demonstration, then a glider..."

"No," Tilly interrupted seriously, "Even if we used a glider, a modified version would be totally different from the original one in practice, not to mention a new plane. If I did not operate it in person, how could I instruct others? It's indeed early for the trainees to drive the plane, but I have to spend at least a month in advance so as to thoroughly understand its performance and make an adjustment to the Flight Manual. Not to mention the following modification. Since you asked me to take charge of it, I'm naturally responsible for urging you to do what you should do."

It was the first time for Roland to see the serious aspect of Princess Tilly.

Apparently, she was indeed fond of this "big toy" which could fly and match her ability.

The only problem was that Roland underestimated the difficulty of making a complete plane. He intended to make a biplane which only had a set of power and fuel equipment more than a glider, but its complexity had already multiplied, even if he could look up the various materials in the Dream World. If he had to design it alone, he probably would not finalize the prototype plane in a few years.

"I know," he shook his head helplessly. "In two weeks, I'll give

you a finished prototype that can fly."

"Then that's a deal," Tilly smiled slightly. "By the way, where is the new type of Chaos Drinks with great taste? Please let me have a try."

...

"Strange..." After Princess Tilly left with a full bottle of Chaos Drink, Nightingale muttered in a low voice.

"What's the matter?" Roland asked.

"She addressed you as brother several times in public before, but when she sees you in private, she rarely does... Isn't it strange?"

"Is it?" He was surprised, "But... why?"

"I don't know either."

They stared at each other and stroked their chins, pondering over this difficult puzzle.

Chapter 1051: Azima's Discovery

Cage Mountain area, northeastern border of the Kingdom of Dawn.

The path became rougher as they climbed. Tangled vines and giant trees were seen everywhere. The thick trees formed such a dense canopy that they could only catch a glimpse of the grey sky between the leaves.

The only thing that comforted Azima was that at least they did not have to walk through the knee-deep snow. With less influence of Months of Demons, the mountain was not covered by heavy snow like the Impassable Mountain Range; otherwise, they would have to wait until the beginning of spring and summer.

This did not mean that walking through the mountains was an easy task.

When they stood at the foot of the mountain, Cage Mountain was just a smooth slope, not steep at all. After they actually entered, they realized that there was no path inside and that it was not suitable for troops to march. On the first day, three people were injured before they climbed for less than two kilometers. In desperation, Sean, the king's guard, had to order the troop to be stationed in the small town at the foot of the mountain and selected several elites to go with Azima.

Knaff, a local guide; Rother, a God's Punishment Witch; Marl, a contact from the Tokat family, Sean, and Azima, formed this weird exploration team.

—Of course, it was weird!

The God's Punishment Witch was said to be sent by His Majesty to look after her. After all, she had to work with men all day, and there would be some inconvenience. Nevertheless, Azima was sure that as long as she tried to run away, the witch would definitely

break her legs without hesitation.

Although Marl Tokat was a contact sent by the King of Dawn, what could he do in the mountain? He did not stay in the town but insisted on climbing the mountain together. Obviously, he had other purposes. He was on behalf of the Tokat family, and indeed helped others a lot; otherwise, he would have been thrown away with a sack by Sean long ago.

Not to mention the exploration team, this "not hostile" team could be even said to be armed to the teeth. Even their shovels could be used as weapons. When they were followed by knights of some lords, they behaved as if they were prepared to destroy the opponents at any time. They had nothing in common with ordinary miners at the bottom of society.

Nobody in the team knew exactly what they were looking for, including Azima. It was not gold or silver, or copper and iron. The only guide was nothing but a small piece of coin in her hands.

"Wait... wait," said the guide, who was walking in front of the team, raising his hand to indicate them to stop. "Be careful, there are traps!"

Azima immediately heard clicks behind her. She knew they were the sound of firearms loading. For the past month, Sean frequently talked to her about the legendary records of the king, and she had a basic understanding of the combat capabilities of this troop. In fact, she came to understand that she preferred staying with these common people like Rother, who was once a witch.

Rother was much calmer. Without even pulling out her sword, she walked steadily to the guide and asked, "Oh, is this... a spear tripwire?"

"Yeah," said Knaff, pointing to the top of a trunk. "Look, the spear is hidden there. Once we accidentally touch the trigger, that stuff will shoot holes all over us!"

Azima looked in the direction of his finger and saw several sharpened wooden sticks between the branches and leaves, which were coldly overlooking them. If the sticks fell on them, their heads and necks would inevitably be severely hurt. This was definitely not a hunter's trap for animals, but more like for human beings.

"Where's the trigger?" Sean asked in a low voice.

"You can't find them," Knaff shook his head. "Every vine under our feet and every branch may be part of the tripwire. Unless we burn it with a torch, it's hard to completely destroy it."

"What should we do?" Marl muttered.

"We have to make a detour, my lord."

"No, step back, all of you." Rother said suddenly, "Let me have a try."

"What... did you say?" Knaff looked at the God's Punishment Witch in surprise. "Hey, it's not a joke—"

Before he finished, she had already strolled into the danger zone.

With the dense weeds, they could not see what was under their foot unless they cut them. After Rother walked for a few steps, Azima heard a slamming sound as if something had been snapped. Then there was a squeaking friction on the top of the tree, just like a viper flicking out its forked tongue.

The tripwire which was hidden somewhere was straightened and ejected the sticks from the top of a tree! At the same time, Rother pulled out her sword!

"No..." The guide immediately closed his eyes as he could not bear to watch the woman dying in front of him.

Still, Azima witnessed everything that followed—

The God's Punishment Witch held the sword with both hands and bounced the sticks shooting toward hers as if she was swatting

flies. Under the giant force, most of the sticks were broken and shattered. She did it easily as if it did not take much effort!

When she stopped, the grassland around her became a mess.

"The trap is removed," Rother withdrew the sword and shrugged. "Let's go ahead."

After realizing what happened, Knaff fell to the ground in astonishment.

...

"Aha... I knew my lords are superb and have extraordinary skills. No wonder you're great men from the king's city!" The guide finally recovered from the scare and immediately spoke with another tone, "Especially this warrior, your art of fencing is legendary!"

"Save your breath." Rother interrupted, "You'd better explain why there are such traps in the mountains. The wooden spears aren't meant for the beasts, are they?"

This was also what Azima wanted to ask.

"It's indeed used to deal with people," Knaff replied honestly. "The higher you go into the mountains, the more traps you'll encounter, so Cage Mountain is also called Trap Mountain. These things were set by the past lords. The only purpose is to guard against the Kingdom of Wolfheart."

"Wolfheart?" Sean echoed.

"Yes, this mountain range extends almost from the seashore to the old Holy City and is regarded as the natural dividing line between the two countries. Since the Kingdom of Dawn is lower in terrain, the mountain is like a cage which surrounds the country. That's why it's called Cage Mountain." Knaff explained, "But the problem lies in the shape of the mountain. You should have noticed when you were at the foot of the mountain. The south side of Cage Mountain is like a smooth slope. High as it is, it's very easy

to go down. Therefore, the robbers, hunters, and refugees from neighboring countries often invaded the border domain of Dawn through Cage Mountain. At first, they only plundered resources in the mountain, but later ran into the villages to steal and rob, and caused a panic among the local subjects. The lord was also annoyed, so he figured out a solution once and for all and that was, to give up Cage Mountain."

"Oh, I see..." Marl Tokat said as he seemed to suddenly understand, "I never knew such things happened on the border."

"The lord naturally did not want it to be known by the king," Knaff said. "What's more, unlike those poor people over the mountain who could not live without the mountain, we could earn a living in other ways. After the mountain pass was sealed, the lord sent people to plant fast-growing weeds and vines, and also set up lots of traps. This practice was handed down from generation to generation. Then Cage Mountain became what it looks like today."

"So you turn it into a real cage. Although you block the opponents, you also confine yourself," Azima thought. "If it were Roland Wimbledon, he would not choose to do so. That man always looks into the distance. Even when explaining the task to me, his focus did not always fall on me."

No, why should I think of him at this time?

Azima shook her head.

His Majesty is merely my employer.

What I should do is to quickly complete the task and get back to Doris and other sisters.

...

As the guide said, they encountered several traps afterward, which basically did not have any effect in front of the God's Punishment Witch. As the night fell, Azima suddenly saw the green light on the coin brighten!

A dazzling light source also appeared behind a dense forest. Between them were countless light spots traveling back and forth to form a bright bridge of light.

This was the reaction of the source material!

She finally managed to find another source!

When the exploration team went through the forest following Azima's instruction, they were shocked by what they saw.

It was an abandoned building halfway up the mountainside. The dilapidated stone gate led to the mysterious depth. The pillars on both sides were marked with weird signs. They were obviously not naturally created.

Azima's eyes widened in surprise.

Did His Majesty not tell her to look for a strange ore?

Why did the source appear in a relic that seemed to have been abandoned for a long time?

Chapter 1052: Protective Measures

"Ha, interesting..." Rother said under her breath.

"What?" Sean looked at her. "What do you mean?"

"I'll let you know, common people." Rother grinned. "The ruins of the underground civilization can be seen in many places of the mainland, and Taquila certainly spent a lot of time studying them," she said, walking up to the mottled column, and then swept the dust off it. "These symbols are not their characters and they have nothing to do with the magic characters the Union once made, either. Keeping in mind the history of the four kingdoms, isn't that interesting?"

Azima was still confused. Although she understood every word Rother had said, she could not comprehend what the words exactly meant when she put them together. However, she felt relieved as she saw the same confusion on both Marl's and Knaff's faces.

Sean revealed a thoughtful look.

"His Majesty once said that in the past, the four kingdoms were only a collection of scattered villages and small towns, located in a small corner of the mainland, and had no real history. If this ruin wasn't left by the civilizations during the Battle of Divine Will, then it means..."

Sean paused suddenly.

"There were people who used to live here and were unknown to us?"

"We're not sure about that," Rother said with great spirit. "No one knows whether the underground civilization could breed any new tribes and create new tongues. We have to enter the ruin to find more information."

"Lord Sean, there seems to be a stone tablet here," the soldier, who was examining the stone gate, suddenly shouted. "The words

on it are written in our characters."

Everyone immediately approached the tablet.

A block of granite rested in the weeds. The moss had grown all over it and only one side of the tablet had been sanded by men so that it was easy to be ignored. It took the soldiers a long time to clear it up before the engraved words could be easily made out.

"This is a place cursed by Gods. You'll die if you enter."

Knaff gasped as he saw the warning on the tablet.

"Is this the rumored... Temple of the Cursed?" He stepped back and stammered.

Sean and the God's Punishment Witch glanced at each other. "You know what it is?"

"I just heard it from other people. It happened more than a century ago..." Knaff stared at the black hole and swallowed. "The lord of this area had ordered his men to set up a lot of traps in the Cage Mountain to prevent the Wolfheart people from crossing the mountain. It was said that a team led by a knight came across a heavy rain when they were performing a mission. The rain in the mountain was variable and transient. The knight commanded his men to find shelters and they discovered a strange temple by accident."

"Oh?" Rother said, raising her eyebrow. "Did they find any treasures in the temple? And the greedy people who stole the treasures were cursed by deities and died a terrible death in the end."

"You've heard that too?" Knaff was surprised.

Rother laughed out. "The nature of common people seems to have stagnated. They've played this kind of trick centuries ago and it still worked. I bet it was the lord who started the rumor. He must have wanted the treasures for himself. The poor villagers were just used to prove the existence of the curse and were

slaughtered secretly."

"But... they didn't die right away."

"What...?" Rother frowned.

The guide cringed and said warily, "They died one by one ten years after the incident, even the knight. It was said they all died painfully. The skin on their faces was peeled off, leaving the rotten flesh exposed. They looked hideous and horrifying. That's what the curse stems from. The lord had to forbid everyone to enter that place to stop the spread of misfortune in his land, so no one knows its actual location."

"Are you sure?" Rother walked over to Knaff and put her arm on the guide's shoulder.

Knaff paled as he looked at the arm that was thicker than his thigh. "I heard all of them in the tavern. I swear I tell no lies. My lord, you can ask someone else if you don't believe me. If there's anything wrong, then the rumors must be wrong."

In Azima's opinion, if the people died so long after the incident, it was unlikely they were killed by the lord. Moreover, it would make sense if the knight and the lord plotted together to murder the villagers, but it was unreasonable to see the knight killed as well. The nobles could not be executed without trial, no matter how insignificant their families were.

Could it really be... the deities' curse?

"Ugh, why don't we... return to the town first and then decide what we're going to do after we collect more information?" the liaison Marl Tokat suggested.

"Decide what we're going to do next?" Knaff looked at Sean in disbelief. "Was the Temple of the Cursed your aim from the very beginning?"

"No, they happen to overlap." Rother let go of Knaff. "What about you? Since you're King Roland's trusted guard, I believe you won't

chicken out, will you?"

"Of course not," Sean replied calmly. "Our priority is to finish the task given by His Majesty. Now the target is just before us. Certainly, we won't retreat."

"Good. Let's enter and meet the so-called 'deities'," Rother said with a hideous smile.

"But we can't enter with no precaution." Sean shook his head. "In fact, His Majesty warned us to be careful of the danger we would possibly encounter in the source."

"Did he... even foresee this?"

"Yes." Sean looked over his shoulder at Azima and said, "That night, after you left, His Majesty told me something in private. He said there might be two possibilities we would run into. One is that the source is exposed on the surface, and in that case, we don't have to do anything but seal the place and return to Neverwinter where we can directly report it to him. The other is that the source is located in an underground cave. The deeper the cave is, the more dangerous it will be. So we need to take protective measures beforehand. It may be inappropriate to call this place a cave, but the temple is in line with all its characteristics."

With that said, he snapped his fingers at the soldier. "Bring up the thing."

Two soldiers unloaded their packages and pulled out five white coats.

Rother squatted down and spread the clothes out curiously. "These're just plain leather coats."

"They won't be if used with the masks." Sean picked up one and slipped himself into it. Azima could only use the word "slip" to describe Sean's movement, for the coat was one-piece designed without even a button and was more like a sack that was cut in human shape than a garment. Now Sean only had his face exposed

and all of his limbs were hidden in the coat, which made him look very weird.

Subsequently, he put on a transparent mask to protect his face. A fist-sized can was fixed on the mask, shaped like a pig's nose.

"Five in and the rest stays," Sean said through the mask. "In addition to Miss Azima and Lady Rother, who else wants to come?"

Chapter 1053: The Source of Light

The guide and the liaison turned down the offer immediately, especially the guide, who had already unknowingly moved away from the entrance and would have run away if there were no soldiers keeping an eye on him.

Rother did not put on the weird coat. "I don't need it. Keep it as a backup."

"Are you sure?" Sean frowned.

"The God's Punishment Warriors have a much stronger resistance and self-healing ability than common people and are immune to general plagues and poisons. I don't think a disease that allowed common people to survive ten more years is a threat to our bodies. This is the most common thing we could find in ruins." She shrugged. "The one-piece coat, on the contrary, would slow me down and dull my keenness, especially in an uncertain place such as this. Moreover, if we encounter a situation that is too difficult to escape, the soldiers outside would have a spare coat to rescue us, though such a thing can scarcely happen."

This was a convincing argument. The God's Punishment Witch could only perceive the outside world by her sight and hearing, so they heavily relied on them. After having been through centuries of training, they could even estimate the humidity and flexibility of the soil by the sound of their footsteps. Azima had already seen this skill during the journey.

For this reason, the protective coat had a larger influence on the God's Punishment Witch than ordinary people, who would just take it as a coat that could cover their eyes and ears.

"But what if... the temple was really cursed by the Gods?" Azima was worried.

Rother let loose the same hideous laugh as she did before. "Let's

put aside the doubt whether a leather coat can resist the Gods' curse. I have no fear in facing them even if there really are Gods inside. I'd like to see how the curse by the Gods could be any worse than the millions of people who perished on the Fertile Plains.

"I see." Sean nodded after a moment of silence. "Let's move now."

Azima took a deep breath and followed the guard entering the stone gate.

Unexpectedly, it was not damp inside the ruin. The sand that had been brought through the entrance had almost blocked the passage so they had to bend over to move forward. However, as they went deeper, the downward passage became less congested and less steep.

With the light of the torch, they could see the wall on both sides of the passage had been severely damaged and the tree roots and vines had dug out of the paved bricks and crawled all over. Rother, who was leading the way, used an ax to open the way. The downward incline would have taken them half a day to pass through if they did not have the God's Punishment Witch to clear the way for them.

"This place has indeed been deserted for a long time, but what Knaff said isn't entirely true. It wasn't sealed off because of the curse," Sean said suddenly. "There must have been people coming and going at least for a period of time."

"What did you find out?" Rother put on a curious look.

"There are torch slots on the wall," he said, pointing toward the wall. "The chiseled lines are much clearer than that of the walls, indicating that they must have formed at very different times. If this is just a place that they used to take shelter from the rain, they didn't need to set up torches at intervals of about ten paces."

There was no doubt that torch slots were only made when people had to walk in and out of this place frequently for a long time.

"Ha, how could the lord not be interested in the treasures inside of this ruin?" Rother sneered. "It's not the guide who lies but the rumor itself has been polished."

"I'm concerned whether the treasures are the thing we are searching for..." Sean said soberly. "If there are many sources, how many have been carried away in the past century and where? His Majesty said that the thing is crucial to the creation of the Glory of the Sun, and we must, by no means, let it fall into the hands of other people."

"These problems can't be solved until Miss Azima leads us to the first source." Rother's body suddenly tensed. "I think we're close."

Finally, there was no more soil covering the stairs and the stone steps were exposed.

They moved much more quickly after that.

30 minutes later, they stopped in front of a sea of darkness. The light shining from their torches could not illumine the way ahead any longer. It was as if the torchlight was being absorbed by the darkness. It looked as though a dark wall was standing there, separating the two worlds.

"That's..." Azima blurted out in amazement.

"A big hole." Rother lifted the torch, entered the darkness, and totally disappeared.

Sean followed her.

"Mind your step." The soldiers guarding the rear warned.

"I will," Azima took a deep breath and stepped into the darkness. Prior to her promise to accept King Roland's task, she had always thought that she was a brave girl. However, she now found herself far behind Sean and Rother in terms of bravery. Perhaps, this was the reason why she could not make the final decision of leaving the Sleeping Island.

"To be frank, you're a coward."

Nightingale's voice once again echoed in her ears.

But this time, it was no longer sarcasm, but a different kind of meaning altogether.

The darkness enveloped her.

It took a few seconds for her eyes to adapt to the dense darkness. She could make out Sean's and Rother's torches. Their lights seemed to have shrunk by a lot and looked small and dim.

"Are we at the bottom of the ruin?" Rother said as she looked around, her voice echoing from the unseen ceiling. "It's smaller than I thought. No more than 200 paces in any direction."

"You can see the edges of the room?" Sean asked.

"It's not that impressive. You don't have many choices when living under the ground for hundreds of years. You either adapt or remain blind."

It wasn't until now did Azima realize why Rother said it was "a big hole". As she entered, the space suddenly extended by a lot so that the firelight could not reflect on the walls and looked much dimmer. The hole was not at the same level with the passage they had just passed through, so those entering first looked as if they had suddenly disappeared.

"How far do we have to go?" Rother looked back over her shoulder at Azima.

She hurriedly took out the coin. Suddenly the green light filled her vision. There were countless bright green spots floating in the air, from the ceiling to her feet, outlining the whole place. It was as though she was in a fictional world, and the endless darkness now had clear boundaries. Under the luminous spots, she could even see the shape of every tile on the floor.

The wall around them was engraved with psychedelic paintings

that were beyond description. What the paintings showed were all mad and chaotic. No human beings could create anything like that. There were rows of iron cages under the paintings in which numerous bones were piled up. She did not know how many people had been imprisoned here and died.

About a hundred paces away from them, the ground sank down and formed a large pit from which a splendid beam of light rose. The beam matched the light of the coin, but the beam was much brighter.

It was her first time seeing such a sight!

"Azima?" asked Sean. Upon not hearing an answer, he turned around and asked, "Are you alright?"

Azima felt the dryness in her throat. She licked her lips and said slowly, "I think... we've arrived."

"Ah? Do you mean we've found the source?" Rother spread out her hands and asked, "Where is it then?"

"We are... inside it now."

The witch answered in low murmurs.

Chapter 1054: Sacrificial Ground

"Your Majesty, there's an urgent report from the Kingdom of Dawn!" The guard entered the office and placed a thick sheepskin bag on Roland's mahogany table. "The messenger said that this was sent by Sean."

"Oh?" Roland suddenly became energetic. He put down his biplane design and stood up. "Let's open it and see."

It had been almost two months since the exploration team left Neverwinter. The most recent news from them was when they crossed Graycastle's border. When he learned that the source was not in Graycastle, Roland had been little worried. After all, the mining and transportation of ore was a long-term process. The First Army had limited mobility and the farther away they were from Graycastle, the harder it was to carry out a mission.

Now that he'd finally received some news after such a long time, he was very interested in what was in the package.

But he was also curious as to why the package was so big. This reminded him of mail order packages. Whether or not they were able to find the source, a letter would have been sufficient to convey the message. What did the exploration team encounter that would cause Sean send over such a big package?

"It's full of paper," Nightingale whispered in his ear as she probably saw the doubts in his eyes.

"Paper?" Roland tilted his head and whispered, "Are your capabilities so evolved that you can see through things?"

"I'd love it if that was the case, but unfortunately no." Nightingale said lazily, "I just slipped my hand into the sack when the guard came in."

"I see, so her level of alertness was still quite... Hang on." It suddenly dawned on Roland that when Evelyn came in with a new

Chaos Drink, or when the chef came in with a snack cart, could she have also pinched a bit of the food and drink?

On the other hand, the amount delivered for afternoon tea had decreased a little.

"Your Majesty, it's all paper inside." The guard's words interrupted his thoughts. "And most of them are covered with ink."

"Is this a new reporting method?" Roland took a look in the bag and said, "Isn't there a letter that I could read?"

"Please wait..." After the guard had dumped out all the contents of the sheepskin bag, there was a new discovery. "There's a letter with a wax seal underneath."

"Bring it over."

"And those papers stained with ink—"

"Just spread them out on the floor," Roland ordered, "Sean couldn't have possibly spent so much energy to send a bunch of useless things."

"Yes!"

Roland sat back on his chair and opened the envelope.

Judging from the date, it should have been sent about a week and a half ago. Like the bag, the letter was also surprisingly large, with at least a dozen pages—it was hard to imagine why an exploration report would be such a lengthy document. This might also be the reason why Sean marked the report as urgent, but decided against using the usual animal messenger system.

"Your Majesty, Miss Azima has found the source that you want—It's located at the northeastern junction of the Kingdom of Dawn, near the Kingdom of Wolfheart. The locals call it Cage Mountain."

Sean's first sentence was enough to reassure Roland.

Fortunately, this trip was not a waste. The fact that the mining

area was still within the Kingdom of Dawn meant that he could control the entire mining process through the Quinn family. Although the cost would be a lot more, it was still better than having to deal with the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter.

Moreover, Sean's choice of words did not seem tedious, which made him even more curious about the package's contents.

"But the source wasn't in a cave, but a very old ruin. What's even more incredible was that it wasn't built by the underground civilization nor did it have anything to do with the Taquila survivors. We initially suspected that it might have come from the undersea monsters, but a discovery by the witches proved otherwise."

"Your Majesty, this ruin was left behind by a group previously unknown to us."

Roland immediately knitted his brows.

Did an unknown group of new aliens appear in the Four Kingdoms?

This was intelligence that had never been mentioned by the Witch Union.

Although this area was barren and backwards in the past, that did not mean that they would ignore their own territory. If there was alien activity, it would be impossible to escape the witches' investigation.

In other words, if Sean's conclusion was correct, then they most likely existed even before the underground civilization.

The key question was, why was this alien group interested in uranium ore?

He continued reading.

"They left behind a large number of murals on the walls at the

bottom of the ruin. The various monsters displayed in the paintings were inconsistent with the images of the other races known to us. Through investigation of their contents, Ms. Rother and I think that the building was very likely used as a place of execution."

"It was not only located on the source of the vein, but they also shaped the uranium ore into bricks for the walls and floor—Azima saw the same element in every corner of the ruins and even on the murals. At the bottom, we found a lot of cages and bones, which was also reflected in the murals."

"They seem to have imprisoned a large number of enemies here—not just other races, but also their own kind. They were tortured using the power of the ore, and it seems as if doing so would please their gods."

"I've already tried to copy as much of the murals as possible and sent Tokat's messenger back to Neverwinter. Due to the limited number of protective suits and the size of the murals, the progress was slow. The murals you have copies of are only of a portion of them. It will likely take another month or two to send copies of the rest."

"In addition, I'm very worried about Ms. Rother who did not wear protective clothing when entering the ruins. I'm not sure if she would encounter the dangers you mentioned. The locals that initially discovered the ruins were infected with something. Many people became sick with strange diseases and many died from unknown causes. So the ruins also are called a cursed temple. Judging from the ruin's execution ground, this danger likely still exists."

"That's bad." Roland could not help but whisper.

"What's wrong?" Nightingale asked from the mist. "If the God's Punishment Witch is cursed, she could just change her body, so I don't think we have to worry about them."

"I wasn't worried about the Taquila witches, but about Sean and Azima." He shook his head solemnly. "According to the plan, they shouldn't have stayed in the mining area for so long."

Whether it was unrefined ore or highly compressed uranium, its radioactive decay mainly consisted of alpha particles, so it would be difficult to penetrate the skin or cause harm to the human body. But this didn't mean that it would be the same in the ruins. Given that these radioactive elements had existed for hundreds of millions of years and some of them had likely decayed into more dangerous elements such as radon, the situation had become different.

The half-life of radon was only 3.8 days, and it was a gas which could be easily inhaled into the body to cause radiation poisoning. The protective suits he prepared for the exploration team were designed for going into deep mining areas—The fully-sealed suit could effectively block out many kinds of highly toxic elements that could be found in a uranium mine. The gas mask could filter out radon and other toxic gases. As long as you didn't stay in the mining area for extended periods of time, you could basically guarantee your safety.

But once too much time had passed, the endurance and effectiveness of the suits would be limited. This meant that those who participated in copying the murals might have exceeded the safety limits and thus been exposed to harmful amounts of radiation.

"They must immediately withdraw from the ruins," said Roland, taking a pen and paper from the table. "Call Honey. This letter must be sent to them as soon as possible."

Chapter 1055: Shocking Scene

In addition to recalling Azima and Rother, Roland also wrote down the follow-up arrangements.

It was a time-consuming and laborious task to mine uranium mines safely. Not only was it necessary to formulate a detailed operational procedure and set up monitoring nodes, workers also needed to have a certain understanding of the work they were engaged in. They would then have to act meticulously according to the rules.

In the face of imminent war threats, he naturally did not intend to follow the normal protocols.

The North Slope mine was a good example.

He bought the prisoners on death penalty directly from the Duke of Quinn. He then threw them into the ruins without compensation and holidays, and he did not need to prepare protective measures for them. They would be released after working for a decade. He believed that those people would make the right choice if they had to choose between the gallows or a chance of survival.

Furthermore, local lords would probably be quite happy to use the lives of these scums in exchange for an additional income.

In this way, the 100 soldiers of the exploration team only needed to be responsible for supervision and security work, thus greatly reducing the requirements of defense.

Sean was undoubtedly the best candidate to be in charge of management.

Finally, at the end of the confidential letter, Roland also made sure to order the guards to look for the whereabouts of the "treasures" that the people had brought out of the ruins a century ago.

After all, there were a few doubts about the rumor that bothered him a little.

This clan, which had not been recorded by history, seemed to have an inexplicable sense of worship for radioactive elements. It used brick ore to build a temple for sacrifices and even used it to torture the enemy. Some were even made to swallow the ore. Those bodies that were filled with green fluorescence, as seen through Azima's eyes, were proof that it happened. Although it was unclear whether their demise had a direct connection with this kind of worship, it was appropriate to call them a radioactive clan.

Since the world was so big, it was not surprising that all kinds of civilization could exist. What was truly strange was that no matter how deep you went into the mining area or took ore to make bricks, it would not be possible to cause "flesh rotting" effects. Even if you lived in mines, the long-term internal and external exposure to various types of decay radiation would only result in a mere increase in the probability of getting cancer. If you were meant to live to the age of 80, you might have lived to the age of 66 only.

After all, natural nuclides' release efficiency is really too low.

Several unlucky people that died in the rumor did not seem to have died from cancer or mutation complications. They seemed to have been affected by strong radiation.

In order to satisfy the latter condition, only the high-purity nuclear material could reach criticality, and a large number of neutron fluxes and hard γ -rays have to be generated in an instant. However, this situation did not seem to be something that the radioactive clan could achieve.

Roland did not rule out the possibility that the rumor itself had distorted the facts. However, the villagers' misery at that time should have been known by more than one person. If it was true,

the problem would most likely be those "treasures".

Only in this way would the ruin take over the function of the altar of execution—Otherwise, every detainee would live for dozens of years before dying. If this altar was not built into a high-rise apartment building, it would not be able to hold so many people.

It was a pity that a century exceeded Summer's retrospective period. It was almost impossible to completely understand what was happening at that time and Sean could only try his best.

He felt that the truth behind the rumors might not be so simple.

...

After Honey took the letter, Roland walked to the desk and examined the paintings that were spread out.

Although the distorted ink images were filled with strange and absurd things, he could still recognize the general subject and object—The subject was mostly located in the center of the scrolls. The outline was large and delicate, representing the ruler of the ruins; the object was much smaller. They were in all of the corners, and from their hideous expressions, you could feel their pain and fear.

This was probably the universal nature of all intelligent life—Always make yourself the protagonist in historical records.

Just like Sean said, neither the subject nor the object was related to the known civilizations such as the demons, the demonic beasts, or the undersea civilization. Their shapes were quite weird, some were like matchsticks with limbs that were indistinguishable from head and tail; while the others were like crawling protozoa with all of their organs located in the brain.

The contents of the murals were not all related to the execution. There were some that depicted the scenes in which the subject and the object were fighting. They seemed to be able to fly by inflating

the body and following the direction of the wind. They seemed to take advantage of the high-altitude to maneuver and land behind the enemy and successfully attack from both sides. The towering defense line was not of any use. The city was a sea of fire and the object was defeated.

As long as the roles were clearly identified, it would also be possible to roughly understand the events described in these seemingly crazy records.

"Huh?" Roland's glance suddenly settled on a picture.

"What's wrong?" Nightingale quickly noticed his strange look.

"Do you feel like you've seen these scenes depicted in the murals before?" He walked to the scroll and bent down to look at a mural describing exactly the last part of the war: countless matchsticks were united as if they were trying to fight to their last breath, but they were still knocked to the ground by the subject. The blood flowed and gathered into huge lakes. The surviving enemies fled to the sea. They were chased by the subject and killed. Their corpses even formed a small bag of a mountain in the sea.

"Oh..." Nightingale observed him for a long time and said, "In addition to using more ink, it doesn't seem to be different from other drawings."

"Well, combat ability and artistic appreciation are inherently opposite." Roland held his forehead and said, "Help me get a map of the Southernmost Region."

"Yes, I will." The latter did it quickly and placed a thick stack of maps in front of Roland. At the same time, she also handed him some dried fish.

Roland bit the dried fish while his hands kept moving. He soon found a partial bird's-eye view of the Endless Cape

At that time, in order to determine the location of Festive Harbor, he asked Lightning and Maggie to make detailed maps of

it, so he still had a deep impression. When the two were put together, he suddenly felt a layer of goose bumps on his back. His body felt like a current had run through him and his fingers were numb.

"The outlines of the two maps overlapped!"

"Although the details were different, the boundary between the mainland and the Swirling Sea was basically the same, and similarity was above 80%!"

"Was this... a coincidence?"

"Hey, is this the Southernmost Region on the map?" Nightingale also realized that something was wrong and asked, "Isn't that where the Sand Nation people live?"

Roland did not answer but quickly scanned the remaining painting scrolls.

When he saw the penultimate one, all the blood in his body seemed to freeze.

He saw only a dozen of the subjects gathered on a high platform, forming a large circle. An irregular polyhedron floated in the circle. There were countless strange tentacles on its surface. It was like the snake demon Medusa's hair.

Sean did not see this scene with his own eyes, so he naturally did not know what was shown in the painting.

However, Roland knew very well what it was.

That was clearly "the relic of gods".

Chapter 1056: The Captive

In the dark dungeon, a dim light cast a shadow on the wall as the captive dangled from the ceiling. The shadow flickered and swayed like a forked tree branch.

The prisoner did not struggle, nor did she utter a yelp or beg for mercy. She only produced an almost inaudible moan when the whip landed on her skin.

But that was soon drowned out by the following lashes.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

The candlelight wavered and flickered as it played with the swaying shadow as it moved across the ceiling. The dull sound of a whipcrack cut through the gruesome silence of the dungeon.

After around ten lashes, Earl Lorenzo said, "Enough. Take a break!"

"Yes, my lord." The executioner withdrew.

Blood trickled down the female prisoner's back. There were new and old whipmarks all over her body. Apparently, this was not her first time being tortured. Beads of sweat stood out from the tip of her nose and arms. Obviously, she was suffering great pain, but she forced herself not to cry out.

"So, are you still not going to tell me where the Holy Book is?" The earl walked up to the woman and grabbed her by the chin, forcing her to look at him. It was a pretty face, despite the constant torture the woman had been going through. As a matter of fact, her damp skin and bright eyes made her even more attractive. "The church is over, Farrina. Do you still want to plot against me? You should at least think about your companions if not about yourself."

"Those damn church dregs!" Lorenzo thought savagely. "There are many places they could have chosen to live in the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Why did they have to pick Archduke Island? I made it very clear when I executed the messengers that I want them to leave me alone. Plus, they have a group of God's Punishment Warriors and could have picked anywhere to settle down as long as they stay as far away from Graycastle as possible. Why did they attempt to murder me? If I didn't ask Pope Mayne to give me some guards to protect me as a precaution, they would have mounted my head on the city wall by now."

At this thought, Lorenzo felt the side of his missing left ear throb again.

When the two groups of God's Punishment Army had fought that day, Farrina had nearly killed him. Fortunately, his guard had blocked her strike. He survived but had also lost his left ear.

Lorenzo was actually more upset about the loss of the God's Punishment Warriors than his missing ear. Out of the 20 God's Punishment Warriors, only two to three were capable of fighting now. The others had either died during the battle or had lost limbs. It was impossible for them to fight again.

Yet he relied on those God's Punishment Warriors to secure his position on Archduke Island!

The nobles in the Kingdom of Wolfheart did not come back to him not because of the change in his status from a bishop to a noble, but because of their fear of the God's Punishment Warriors. If they knew he had only a few capable God's Punishment Warriors left, they would probably strip him of his earl title immediately.

Lorenzo was so tempted to cut Farrina into pieces.

But he could not do that.

Not before he knew where the Holy Book was.

"I'm not sure whether the church is over, but I know you are..."

Earl Lorenzo, no, I should call you a traitor," After a moment of silence, Farrina said quietly. "My biggest mistake was that I underestimated your God's Punishment Warriors, but there are few you can use now, right? Otherwise, you wouldn't need the Holy Book so badly. You want to know the secret passing down among the popes, which is how to create the God's Punishment Army, so that you can keep your pitiable position..."

"Smack!"

The earl boxed her ears.

"You'd better tell me what I want!" Lorenzo threatened through his teeth. "Tell me, where is the Holy Book?"

Blood dripped down from the corner of the prisoner's mouth. Farrina said, "I don't know..."

"That's really a pity." The earl eyed the executioner. "Chop off a leg. Pick anyone you like. I want her companions..."

"Stop acting." Farrina interrupted Lorenzo feebly in a derisive tone. "You remember the finger you sent me last time? The blood had darkened. Do you still want to play the same trick? It seems that the comfortable life here has made our bishop forget the difference between a living man and a dead one. You chopped it off from a body, right? You killed them a long time ago, traitor!"

Lorenzo's face clouded over.

"I'm not even an acting pope. How would I know where the Holy Book is? Pope Tucker Thor might know it, but he never told me. Nobody in this world would ever know how to create a God's Punishment Army now."

"You're lying!" Lorenzo went livid. "Tucker Thor asked you to come to rebuild the church in the Kingdom of Wolfheart and revenge Hermes! Without the Holy Book, how can the church compete against Graycastle?"

"Haha..." To Lorenzo's surprise, Farrina laughed. "With a God's

Punishment Army, the church can't compete against Graycastle either. The acting pope simply wanted to save us and for everybody to spend the rest of their lives peacefully."

"This is absurd! Do you think I'll believe you?" The earl roared. "If you planned to settle down, why did you attack Archduke Island? Didn't you attempt to steal the wealth, the food, the armors and the weapons here? Tucker entrusted the God's Punishment Warriors to you, and he just wanted you to live a happy life? Nonsense!"

"Believe it or not, but this is the truth," Farrina said indifferently. "I also want to tell you something else. If you didn't kill the messengers but treated them fairly, we would have probably chosen somewhere else to settle down. But you made the worst decision. You know what kind of people I despise? Those double crossers like you!"

"You—"

"You failed Pope O'Brien, so you don't deserve the life Pope Tucker Thor earned for us." There was a faint starchiness in Farrina's voice. "It's a shame that I didn't kill you, but the nobles in the Kingdom of Wolfheart would eventually know who you are. Even if you have washed your hands off the whole matter and have nothing to do with the church, you'll never become a true noble! You're just a traitor living on borrowed time!"

Lorenzo took a deep breath, trying to suppress his anger. He growled, "I know exactly what your little scheme is. You just attempted to provoke me into killing you so that the whereabouts of the Holy Book would remain as a secret forever. But I can make you spit it out. There are not only supplies in here but also a lot of instruments of torture which we normally use on witches. I wonder if you would hold up better than those Fallens."

He cast a glance at Farrina's feet and said, "Let's start with your toenails... I hope you could still play tough when I rip them off."

...

After returning to the castle hall, Lorenzo could not contain himself any longer. He smashed the tea set onto the floor.

"Damn, damn, damn Farrina!"

He had armed himself with a mask of cruelty to conceal his inner uncertainty. In fact, Lorenzo had no idea how long it would take Farrina to yield. As a member of the Judgement Army, she had an exceptionally strong willpower. Perhaps, it would not be that easy to get something out of her.

He could not just close the port and announce a trade ban all of a sudden, for that would immediately raise suspicions among the nobles. If he, however, left Archduke Island as it was, there was a big chance that the nobles would appoint merchants to spy on him. Therefore, he needed more God's Punishment Warriors to protect him before it was too late!

But Farrina, a person he loathed so much, refused to tell him that key information.

"This is so frustrating!"

Just then, his butler came in. "Your lordship, I've heard something interesting recently..."

"Get out of here. I'm not in the mood for some trivial gossip!"

The butler looked at the broken crockery and said patiently, "It may be helpful in solving your problem."

"What?" Lorenzo looked up instantly. "What is it?"

After he became an earl and the lord of Archduke Island, his followers also became his "family members". Hagrid, the butler, was one of his henchmen. As a former priest, he sometimes provided Lorenzo with counsels. "The border of the Kingdom of Dawn has been a little unstable lately. It seems that they plan to head to Cage Mountain."

"What does it have to do with us?" Lorenzo scowled. "Archduke Island won't gain anything from it, no matter who takes Cage Mountain."

"I'm not talking about the operation itself, but the person behind this..." Hagrid paused for a second and continued, "Your lordship, I've heard that the King of Graycastle is behind this."

Chapter 1057: An Ancient Treasure

"The King of... Graycastle!"

Lorenzo shuddered at this name.

Everybody in the church had heard of him. Within merely a few years, this man had elevated himself from the lord of an insignificant border town to the sovereign of the state. Nothing could explain his sudden rise. He had even defeated the Holy City of Hermes which had once dominated the entire continent.

In fact, Roland Wimbledon was the main reason Lorenzo had made such a quick decision to sever his relationship with the church. Realizing that the conflict between the church and Graycastle could never be settled, he had quickly resigned his bishop position to escape from the trouble.

But Lorenzo did not understand why Roland suddenly extended his power to the borders of the Kingdom of Dawn and the Kingdom of Wolfheart. As a new king, he should have focused on domestic affairs instead of creating a new commotion. He wondered what Roland was up to this time.

"Are you sure?" asked the earl as he looked at Hagrid. "Fill me in!"

"I got the news from various reliable sources," Hagrid said positively. "The troop stationed at the foot of Cage Mountain is from Graycastle. Their outfits and weapons fit the description. Further, death row prisoners from all parts of the Kingdom of Dawn are heading to Cage Mountain as well. Some of them proclaimed that they work for the King of Graycastle!"

"Cage Mountain... death row prisoners..." Lorenzo paced the room when a sudden thought struck him. "Is he coming for that..."

"Very likely, your lordship." Hagrid nodded before correcting himself, "No... he must be coming for that."

"How did he know?" asked the earl.

"It isn't surprising that he knew. The discovery of the ruin was simply pure luck. I always thought that there must be a connection between those ruins, and Roland happens to be the first person who noticed this connection."

Although the church did not know the exact reason behind Prince Roland's swift rise, there were quite a few theories. Apart from ridiculous rumors such as the incarnation of God and the spokesman for the demons, many people believed that Prince Roland had obtained some mysterious power from a ruin.

Even though the three Archbishops had dismissed this theory as another groundless rumor, many believers had insisted that this was the truth. Lorenzo had also been one of them.

"Otherwise, how did Roland defeat the Holy City?"

The most incredible ruin in Cage Mountain was the Cursing Temple.

A few years ago, when the God's Punishment Army had invaded the Kingdom of Wolfheart, many nobles had either been killed in action or surrendered. Even the Queen of Clearwater had failed to stop the church. As the former bishop in Archduke Island, Lorenzo had assisted in the logistics and the post-war clean-up. He had been responsible for sending some of the looted military supplies to the front and storing away the rest. During an operation at Cliff Ridge, he had accidentally learnt about an ancient legend that had been circulated for 100 years.

It was rumored that a group of villagers had stolen some treasures from the Cursing Temple but died shortly afterwards. The local nobles had later taken possession of these treasures which the ancestors of Cliff Ridge's Earl had been very interested in. He believed that the deaths had nothing to do with the curse on the temple but with the treasures taken out from the temple. Thus, he had put a lot of effort and time searching for them and had finally retrieved a part of these treasures from the Kingdom of

Dawn.

The research had cost a dozen lives. In the end, the old earl had finally found something unusual. It was a lethal weapon that produced a deadly ray, working just like a curse!

But the weapon had lost its power after several uses as if its power had been exhausted. Although the old earl had sent many people to the border to search for a similar one whilst even risking his life to explore the temple himself, he had not found a way to recover it. Therefore, he had recorded the incident in his family book, hoping his descendants would one day find an answer. The miraculous "weapon" had thus been passed down through generations until the church had seized Cliff Ridge a century later.

Lorenzo had been very interested in the item in the beginning. However, after he had played around with it for a few times, nothing had happened. He had thus lost his interest and put it away with the other treasures in the warehouse, planning to deal with it after he had returned to the Holy City.

After all, he could not take a family book too seriously. Many nobles boasted about their long family history, their aristocratic origin, and their accumulated wealth. If the church was so gullible as to believe all of them, they would not have wiped out the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter that easily. Rather, it would have been the other way around.

After the church had suffered a miserable defeat in Coldwind Ridge, the situation had taken a turn for the worse. Nobody had cared about the looted items any longer, and Lorenzo had also put the matter out of his mind. He had almost forgotten about it until Hagrid reminded him.

It was very likely that the King of Graycastle was coming for the treasures in the Cursing Temple.

Getting excited, the earl urged Hagrid. "Go on!"

"Yes, your lordship." Hagrid inclined his head. "Suppose Roland Wimbledon learned about the treasures in the ruins from other sources, he would probably know how this thing works. According to what I know, this powerful thing can probably replace the God's Punishment Warriors."

"Right, this is a cursed weapon! It can definitely deter the nobles in the Kingdom of Wolfheart from challenging my authority. Meanwhile, it'll earn me some time to search for the Holy Book," thought Lorenzo.

Lorenzo stomped in excitement. "Come with me to the warehouse, now!"

"Your lordship?"

"I have to make sure that it's still on Archduke Island. Since it's so important, I have to guard it well."

...

To prevent an information leak, Lorenzo took no one but his butler and searched the whole warehouse for half a day. After hours of strenuous work, he finally found the "treasure" in a corner.

Lorenzo was happy that he did not include a third person in this search.

As he opened the pouch, he immediately noticed its difference compared to the other treasures.

Compared to all the other looted treasures such as luminous pearls and beautiful sculptures, the thing in the pouch was nothing but a stone. It was square, much coarser than polished granites, and was not even bigger than his palm. Nobody would have ever spared it a glance if there were no decorative sapphire stripes on it.

The Earl of Cliff Ridge had also mentioned in his family book that the item had cost him the least out of all the treasures he had owned.

But now, the stripes on the stone were emanating a soft blue glow. The light pointed from one end to the other as if it was giving a direction.

Lorenzo exchanged a look with the butler. Both of them were exhilarated by their discovery!

It was unbelievable that the stone, which had been unresponsive over the past 100 years, would show signs of activity just when Roland sent his people to the Cursing Temple.

Now, Lorenzo was almost certain about Roland's motive!

He was sure that Roland knew how to recover the stone!

"I want you to go to Cage Mountain," said Lorenzo as he slipped the stone into his pocket cautiously. "I trust no one but you. Try to get the information on how to use the stone. Don't worry about money."

"Rest assured. I'll do my best," replied Hagrid while placing his hand on his chest.

"Another thing," The earl said slowly. "Make sure that the King of Graycastle doesn't notice you. He could destroy the church and certainly could destroy you effortlessly. You have to keep a low profile unless the stone exerts its power... I place the future of Archduke Island in your hands."

Chapter 1058: No More Regret

In a tavern at the dock of Archduke Island.

Joe fumbled a wineglass restlessly as he glanced towards the door from time to time.

He had never been so fidgety before.

Although his mind was crowded with a multitude of feelings, he could do nothing but wait miserably in regret whilst feeling afraid and lost.

Joe felt a little relieved when a hooded man came and sat down next to him, but he soon felt even more nervous.

"How... is she doing?" asked Joe.

Joe fixed his eyes on the man's lips, dreading for the worst scenario.

"She's still alive," replied the man.

Hearing this answer, Joe let out a sigh of relief.

"But Ms. Farrina isn't in a good condition," said the man as he took off his hood. "It appears that the bishop wanted to get something out of her, so he tortured her every day. Sometimes, I've even heard her screams reach the hall. If things go on like this, she won't be alive for long."

Joe tried to convince himself that this was inevitable. After their plan had failed, he had foreseen the fierce retaliation from their enemy. As the traitor wanted to know the whereabouts of the Holy Book, he would definitely use every possible means to get Farrina, the leader of the operation, to open up.

"At least, she's still alive," Joe muttered under his breath.

He slowly made his hand into a fist with his nails sinking into his flesh. He did not want to picture what would happen to Farrina if he failed to rescue her. Perhaps at the end of the day, death may

actually give her relief.

"Damn it! Why did I agree to her plan?" Joe thought savagely. He should not have let Farrina act as the diversion. He would rather fight to his last breath and die with her in the castle than retreat alone.

"Sir..." The man hesitated for a moment and asked, "Do you know what the bishop is asking for? Maybe you should just let him have it. That will at least free Ms. Farrina from..."

"He's not a bishop, only a traitor!" Joe said within himself. He replied through his teeth, "I don't have what he wants. It was destroyed when Hermes Cathedral fell."

There was a hint of melancholy in his look when the man heard the word "Hermes". He murmured, "May God bless us..."

Joe thought it pretty ironic. Back in the old days before the fall of the new and old Holy Cities, as one of the most outstanding Judgement Warriors, he had always been surrounded by the most prominent figures in the church. At that time, he would have never taken an ordinary believer seriously. But now, with the betrayal of the bishop and the priest, he could trust no one but this believer who came from the bottom of the pyramid. It appeared that this man had a deeper love for the church than many of the executives. He had come to him when he had sunk to his lowest dejection.

The man also felt bitter about Lorenzo's betrayal, but with little power, he could not openly defy him. The night the castle had been attacked, he had caught a glimpse of the invaders. From then on, he had started to look for Joe around the castle, and this was how they had met.

Joe did not care whether this man was a spy sent by Lorenzo or not, for he practically had nothing else to lose. If this man was indeed a spy, he should have noticed that he had nothing to offer by now and thus killed him.

Unfortunately, this man was just a servant of the lowest rank in the castle. The information he could provide was very limited.

"I've got to go." After a long silence, the man pulled his hood on. "The butler would suspect me if I lingered too long. Are we still meeting here in three days?"

"Ah..." Joe suddenly came back to reality from his reminiscence. "Sounds good to me. If anything changes, I'll let you know."

"I see." The man paused for a few seconds and then said, "Sir, you must pull yourself together. You are now the only person that can save Ms. Farrina."

"Me? No... I can do nothing." Joe left his words unsaid.

He was walking in the dark, hapless and hopeless. God had turned a deaf ear to his prays.

Joe nodded blankly.

"Right," The man turned around again, "Something happened in the castle lately. One of the bishop's henchmen, Priest Hagrid, went to the southwest. The coachman said they were heading to Cage Mountain. I thought you might... want to know about it."

His voice trailed off towards the end. It was a very unconfident consolation.

It was perfectly normal for a lord to send his men to some other domains, even though Cage Mountain had nothing to do with Archduke Island. As long as the God's Punishment Warriors were still there, it was impossible for him to get Farrina out of the dungeon.

"Noted. Thank you."

"Anytime, sir..." The man dipped in a bow before he said, "This is all I can do for you."

"Cage Mountain... It looks like everybody is talking about it lately," Joe thought as he drained the glass. His mouth was soon

saturated with the bitter taste of ale. The next moment, however, he stood transfixed.

"Hang on... Cage Mountain?"

An idea suddenly flashed across Joe's mind.

"Perhaps there's a chance of saving Farrina after all!"

...

After returning to his abode in the suburb, Joe rested his eyes on a black book on the desk.

It was the "last will" of the acting pope Tucker Thor before he had jumped off the city wall.

It was not the Holy Book that contained the method of creating the God's Punishment Army but a request from Tucker. The book talked about the history of human beings and demons, as well as the origin of the Battle of Divine Will. Joe was agape as he read the story and suddenly understood the reason why Tucker had asked them to leave Hermes.

"Everything is over."

"Worry no more about the battle. Live your own lives."

Farrina did not want the church to fall apart probably because she did not want to see Tucker's sacrifice to be for nothing. She wanted Roland Wimbledon and his Kingdom of Graycastle to fall before the church.

But now, Joe saw a ray of hope in the very king who had destroyed the church.

He did not expect Graycastle to help him.

They would never save the remaining church members.

However, he could direct them to attack the traitor.

He had not given much thought to Cage Mountain until the believer had reminded him. At first, he had thought this was just

another groundless rumor and he did not want to deal with Graycastle anymore. But now, he remembered that Lorenzo had indeed found a treasure at Cage Mountain and had even reported to the church when he had been the caretaker for the items looted from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. He did not know whether the treasure had been shipped to Hermes, but it did not matter. What mattered was whether the King of Graycastle was also looking for it.

The nobles in the Kingdom of Wolfheart might fear its cursing power, but Roland would not.

Nobody could stop his impregnable army.

As long as Roland could help him weed out the traitor, he would have a chance to save Farrina.

Even if Farrina was, unfortunate to be captured by Roland, it would be still better than the endless tortures here.

Joe took a deep breath.

If in the end, Farrina fell into Roland's hand, he would come forward.

He wanted to be there for her until her final moments.

Because... he loved her...

He had been in love with her ever since the first day he had joined the Judgement Army with Farrina.

This time, he did not want to leave any regrets.

Chapter 1059: Puzzle And Battles

Two weeks after receiving the emergency report from Sean, the sun once again appeared in the Western Region of Graycastle.

The Months of Demons ended without any problems.

This was probably the most peaceful Months of Demons that has happened in hundreds of years. There were no evil beasts harassing or roaring. The snowy plains outside the walls were empty and flat. The thick snow reflected the dazzling golden light of the sun. It looked like a piece of flawless mirror.

Thus, this year's Victory Day was exceptionally lively.

Many residents walked into the wilderness without waiting for the snow to melt. They plucked a pile of snow from the knee-deep snow and brought it home to boil and drink. It was both a celebration and a memorial.

Only a very small number of people knew about the undercurrent beneath the calm.

The Third Border City, Library Cave.

Roland received an expected response.

"None of the documents ever mentioned this record. Not even the literature left by the underground civilization." Celine leaned tiredly against the corner and ancient books that she had flipped open were piled up around her. "And for the first record about the Southernmost Region, that was about 860 years ago. It was a travel note, probably written by a certain witch. The description was only a few words, but it confirmed that the Endless Cape was a desert."

This was the first time that he saw "Blob" looking so tired—the three senior witches rarely sat down and usually relied on the main tentacles that were hanging on the dome, the fine whiskers on their bodies were always dancing. However, at this moment, all of

her tentacles drooped down and looked like fur on the surface. At the first glance, it looked a bit like a radish that was just pulled out of the earth.

"You should probably take a break."

"I'd also like to do that. But I can't stop my body at all," said Celine with a bitter laugh. "Your discovery's too shocking. It can be said to be a subversion of the Union—no, that's not right. It's disrupted the entire recorded history of mankind!"

This was also why Roland had long anticipated the answer—if there were related discoveries in the era of the Union, it would certainly have been recorded in some way. After all, it involved the Battle of Divine Will. Even if it needed to be kept secret, at least the entire senior management would not be ignorant about it.

The ethnic groups in the murals might be even older than what he had imagined. For the last 860 years, they only had a single well-documented testimony and it did not mean that the Southernmost Region was full of vigor before this. From this point of view, the myths of the "Three Gods Emissary" and the "Millennium War" circulated by the Mojins were somewhat more reliable.

At that time, the first Battle of Divine Will had not yet begun.

"Your Majesty, I have to admit," she said with a long sigh, "we have clearly taken a big step forward in our research, but why do I still feel so confused? It's like I've lost something."

"This is all normal," Roland comforted her by saying, "the more you know, the more you will feel like you actually know nothing. In the end, all doubts can be attributed to three problems."

"Oh? Which three?" Pasha asked curiously.

"Where am I, who am I hitting, who is hitting me?"

"..." She silently immersed herself in thinking.

"Oh, well, I just wanted you all to relax a little," Roland coughed twice. "The real answer should be who am I, where do I come from, and where am I going."

"Where did I come from... where am I going?" Pasha murmured again. "These three questions seem very simple, but when you think about it, the answer is not that easy. You only have to change the perspective slightly and you will be faced with different answers."

"Oh, have you gone in a daze after reading too many books?" El could not resist interrupting. "What's wrong with this? I'm El from Taquila and I'm going back to Taquila—won't it be fine like this? I think you've been deceived by him."

"This is the reason why I envy you occasionally," said Celine, unable to put the main tentacles on top of her head. "Being simple-minded can be a form of happiness sometimes."

Pasha shook her head whilst laughing. "Thank you very much. It did relax us a bit. But your response really surprised me. Not only were you calm, but you also took our thoughts into consideration. It was as if you were not the least bit surprised about this."

"Because in my opinion, the world itself is full of uncertainty..." Roland smiled arbitrarily and changed the subject. "Since we have confirmed the unknown Battle of Divine Will and the existence of new ethnic groups so we should hold a meeting—such important news should be conveyed to everyone, the sooner the better."

"As you wish, Your Majesty." Pasha bent her main tentacles and replied.

...

The internal meeting was soon held in the castle's main hall. The degree of secrecy was classified as top secret. Participants were all representatives of the forces of the united front. Even the ministers of the administrative department were invited too.

When Roland announced this accidental discovery, everyone was in disbelief. He also gave a rare ten-minute buffer to allow everyone to whisper among themselves.

The Battle of Divine Will was not bounded to the fate of mankind. It was most likely a "special" normality. This was simply beyond the imagination of everyone. If Roland was not the messenger, few people would believe it.

As the hall gradually fell silent, Tilly stood up and said, "If this was really a Battle of Divine Will, where are the winners? They are neither the demons, the sea monsters, the underground civilization nor the humans... Where are they now?"

This was also the question that most people came up with.

Roland looked at Pasha behind the light curtain. The latter nodded. "I wonder if you still remember that there are two sentences in the records of the underground civilization—that magic has made us extraordinary and that the mastery of magic was a step to getting close to the divine meaning. We might as well assume that all participants in the Battle of Divine Will could use magic, which means the winner could have raised the power of magic to a new level, thus going somewhere we can't see? For example... the celestial world."

This was also the conjecture that the three senior witches came up with after racking their brains. Although Roland felt that there were many loopholes, it was still better than a simple "I don't know."

Not knowing meant nothingness—according to common sense, the stronger a civilization was, the longer its footprint would remain. The ancient people built houses with hay and mud masonry. A millennium was enough to turn them into dust. On the other hand, Neverwinter had concrete buildings, that even after a millennium, would still leave their outlines. A civilization that may have won the Battle of Divine Will, disappeared without a

trace after the war and that could only be identified from the scattered relics, undoubtedly made it quite easy for people to imagine the worst.

If winning could not reverse the fate of extinction, then this would greatly impair everyone's determination toward the war.

This speculation by Taquila would at least help to set a goal.

"So what was written on the murals was written at least a thousand and four hundred years ago?" Edith then said, "And what the humans experienced cannot be called the first Battle of Divine Will."

"Though that's the case, changing the name would be confusing," Roland replied. "So I tentatively called it a "lost battle." As to whether it was the first battle, that was not important."

"Your Majesty," Barov said hesitantly, "the expedition plan that was scheduled to be carried out after the start of the spring—"

"Let's follow the previously formulated plan," he said without hesitation. "Even if there are a lot of unsolved mysteries in the Battle of Divine Will, we must move forward! Maybe war itself was a way to get us closer to the mystery. If we are defeated by the demons, then there will be no hope left."

Roland paused, looked across the hall and said clearly, "This time, we must sweep the demons completely out of the Fertile Plains. This is not only to secure the space needed for Neverwinter's development, but also to lay the foundation for the final victory!"

Chapter 1060: Bidding Farewell

After nearly a year of preparation, Neverwinter was now operating at full speed like a war machine.

The Months of Demons could not stop this new king's city from madly absorbing neighboring resources. The Administrative Office once thought that the population of 100,000 was an unattainable goal, but after just one year, the urban population had doubled. The infusion of a large number of fresh labor forces has led to the rapid expansion of various industries, and four new chemical plants were even added. Machine-related processing and assembly plants have also exceeded double digits.

According to statistics, the monthly salary paid by the Administrative Office was close to 10,000 gold royals. When Roland first arrived here, the highest income was only 24,000 gold royals—this was after plundering Longsong Stronghold. In other words, the fortune amassed by the Duke of the Western Region after half a lifetime would only be enough for two and a half month worth of wages.

Steam engines, paddle steamers, perfumes and Chaos Drinks constitute the main sources of revenue—these goods were sold through the Joint Chamber of Commerce to the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms. In addition to the reward that had to be paid, the rest of the money went to a large number of raw materials and handicraft products. The coming and going of money now formed a delicate balance, and savings in the Treasury have started to diminish.

This was a very uneven development model, but in the face of the threat of the Battle of Divine Will, Roland did not have much of a choice.

If resources were not devoted to heavy industry, machine guns would not be able to shoot at will, and artillery would always lack

cannonballs.

Only in this way could he arm the entire army.

Expanding the First Army from 8,000 to 10,000 people was only the foundation. The Air Force under the command of Tilly Wimbledon was also in active preparation. In addition, the "Conscription Act" and "National Mobilization Act" have entered the drafting stages. These two policies were aimed at improving the war potential of Neverwinter by mobilizing the ordinary students, workers, and farmers to perform the most basic discipline training. This was similar to the college military training of the later years. Although they could not be allowed to use guns directly on the battlefield, the training time could be shortened when there was an urgent need to replenish the manpower.

Since the specific time for the upcoming Bloody Moon already had some discrepancy, no one could determine when the Battle of Divine Will would start. It could be four to five years if they were optimistic and in the worst case scenario, it might be within one or two years. For Roland, the biggest strategic goal at the moment was to turn defense into offensive so that the war would be in the enemy's territory.

Therefore, the demon who invaded the ruins of Taquila was the nail he had to pull out.

In fact, the transportation of materials and the mobilization of personnel began gradually during the late winter and early spring.

This was where the advantages of rail transportation came in. Even if heavy snow filled the entire Fertile Plains, as long as the rails were cleared, the essential war supplies could still be continuously transported to the front lines.

Most of the steel produced in Neverwinter had become single steel rails. The route hidden in the Misty Forest had also been laid. Once Roland made the order, the new Northern Expedition would be officially launched.

Both the corps and the city were ready to go.

However, before this, he had two more things to handle.

...

On the second day after the Months of Demons ended, Roland received a request for a meeting with Thunder.

"What's wrong, leaving so soon?" He set up a relaxed afternoon tea in the parlor. While fetching Anna, he also sent an invitation to Margaret—with regards to this businesswoman who had a certain chemistry with Lightning, he could only help this much. "Are you impatient to explore the Shadow Sea City?"

"I knew I couldn't hide it from you," laughed Thunder cheerfully. "Every moment that I controlled the steel ship, I was imagining it facing the scene of the sea breeze. If I could, I even hoped to sail straight to the sealine."

"In that case, we will probably face the risk of water shortages halfway through the journey." Margaret shook her head reluctantly. "The other Chamber of Commerce that have invested heavily in you would not be happy to see you leave their fleet behind. Unless you plan never to return to Fjord Islands."

"Haha, I just wanted to express my excitement to His Majesty," he said, touching his chin. "As Margaret said, this adventure is no longer just about me. After all, for the Fjords, the development of new sea areas means opportunities and wealth, and no Chamber of Commerce would be untempted. This is probably the biggest expedition in the history of the Fjord Islands. I need to return as soon as possible to make adequate preparations."

It seemed that after Thunder's propaganda and recruitment, the team has now become a group. Roland smiled and sipped a mouthful of his tea. Thunder was without a doubt the greatest explorer in the Fjords. He was able to attract huge investments just by expressing his interest. "It seems that in a few short months,

you have already mastered the steel ship."

"This was thanks to Her Majesty Anna," said Thunder, saluting Anna by pressing his chest, "the subsequent improvements that she made to the hull was of great help. You have to see it in person, otherwise, it would be difficult to imagine that such a large iron vessel could be nimbler than the three-masted ships.

"I'd also like to make a request." Anna nodded and said, "This ship was only active in the Shallow Beach near the sea during the trial. If it's possible, I hope to get a navigation report about the deep sea area. All the problems encountered should be recorded there. It is best to use Neverwinter's new waterproof ink and a sealant bag. So even if it falls into the sea, it can be completely preserved."

He probably did not expect her to make such a serious request so Thunder hesitated for a while before saying, "I understand. You can count on me, Your Highness."

Roland touched Anna's head lovingly and then looked at Thunder. "There's also something that I would like to entrust to you."

"I await your instruction."

"I'd like to recruit a group of explorers."

"Unrelated to this expedition?" Thunder quickly realized.

"Yes," Roland put down his teacup. "I would like them to go to the Endless Cape."

"I remember there was nothing except yellow sand and black water," Margaret said surprisedly.

"That's what I thought as well..." Roland shrugged. "The Endless Cape was low-risk, so there would be no need for experienced experts. So quantity would be more important than the ability."

Seeing that he did not elaborate on the reasons, Thunder did not

persist in his questioning. "There're many people like these in the Fjords. I wonder what the rules of eligibility are..."

"None," Roland replied. "Although we specified for an explorer, in fact, anyone can do it—whoever finds any relics in the Endless Cape will be rewarded."

"Even if it's only a brick of the ruin that remains?"

"Naturally, but only if it comes from the Endless Cape." He confirmed by saying, "The more information a relic contains, the bigger the reward. The news will be valid for a long time. As long as I'm the king of Greycastle, it'll be honored."

"With your words as a guarantee, I'm afraid that area will be crowded in the future." Margaret smiled and said, "I wonder if I should take the opportunity to open a tavern in Festive Harbor?"

"You would be most welcome." Promoting the economy of the oil port was indeed one of Roland's goals. After all, the civilization in the painting had a history of at least 1,400 years. It was still unknown if anything was left behind at all. Undoubtedly reward was a good way of recruiting explorers, and killing two birds with one stone.

"By the way, Your Majesty," said Thunder, "since the steel ship has passed the sea test and is officially put into use, does it have a name yet?"

"Of course, I intend to call it the Snow Breeze."

"The Snow Breeze...?" The explorer pondered for a moment. "Surely it's a good name, but wouldn't that be too soft, and not fit for its steel body?"

"Both rigid and soft combined is the best way," Roland could not help raising his lips. "More importantly, this name implies auspiciousness and will surely bring you good luck this time."

Chapter 1061: Sport Event

While blowing a steam whistle, the ship slowly left the Shallow Beach.

Joan was standing at the stern, reluctantly bidding farewell to the Exploration Group—after a whole winter, her relationship with the witches had improved a lot. This rare friendship was particularly strong probably because it had been such a long time since someone had cared for her or had missed her.

Though it sounded dry and hard, she just kept repeating the phrase "Goodbye," which she had just learned before leaving.

Lightning's expression looked quite lonely. She looked in the direction of the stern, her eyes wide open. Many times Roland came close to telling her that Thunder was on the boat. However, he thought of the latter's entrustment and eventually pushed the urge back into the bottom of his heart.

Maggie had covered her mouth, her shoulders shaking and with her eyes filled with tears. She was unable to make any sound for quite some time, probably because she was afraid of crying.

Only Lorgar remained calm. She was carrying Maggie on her tail, Lightning with her one hand and waving at Joan with her other hand—parting forever was something common for the Mojins so she had grown used to it.

In Roland's eyes, Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan was not the loner she was when she first came to Neverwinter. She had already started changing even though she probably had not noticed it yet.

This was also a reason why Roland decided not to tell her.

With such a group of friends, he was sure that Lightning would return to her previous energetic self sooner or later.

As for the sisters that left, for now, they would all eventually

return.

...

On the following day after Thunder's departure, Roland announced the news of king's city's first National Sports Meeting through Graycastle Weekly newspaper.

There was only one event. Marathon.

The starting points would be the main city areas of both Neverwinter and Longsong while the finishing point would be the center of the Kingdom Main Street—a total distance of twenty-eight kilometers. The first ten would win a prize ranging from 100 to 10 gold royals and the champion would receive a commemorative badge from the king himself.

This news instantly shook the entire Western Region!

Soon, everyone in the streets and alleys was inquiring about the event, and the fuss was no less than the release of the magic movie.

If 100 gold royals were used as a down payment, one could buy a home with water, heat, and electricity in the nearest district to the Castle District. Apart from those locals who moved at the very beginning, this was the objective for most Neverwinter citizens.

Although the new king's city did not have an inner and outer city like traditional cities, and there were no walls between each area, people still wished to be closer to His Majesty the King.

Usually, achieving such a goal would require many years of savings but now there was an opportunity to realize it instantly!

This was different from the Outstanding Contribution Award and the Combat Hero Award—the former was given to masters of their respective fields. Even without the gold royals of the prize, they still would not miss the money. As for the latter, it would require a willingness to sacrifice your own time, courage, and also luck. However, what about the Sports Meeting?

One only had to know how to run!

Everybody had two legs after all.

In everyone's eyes, this was another proof of His Majesty compassion and kindness towards his people.

In the past, all good policies were directed towards official residents. However, this time, what was more gratifying for most people was that this event was for "all citizens", exactly as it was announced in the weekly newspaper.

Not only citizens of Neverwinter but even merchants coming from other cities could participate.

So it was not surprising that this novel activity had created such a big impact.

Of course, what Roland wanted to do was not just to watch a competition and see who is the faster runner—a sports meeting was useful in strengthening cohesion, encouraging people to challenge themselves and work hard. As the aftermath of the Victory Day's celebration and the last call before the start of the war, there was nothing more inspiring than a sports meeting.

Also, he had one more small intention.

To announce the comeback of the bike.

He had always felt guilty about the failure of the product of his early policy—the proud invention of the King of Graycastle, chief Barov's advertisement presentation, as well as the posters that had filled the square everywhere at that time. Yet, after producing no more than two hundred vehicles, they had to stop the distribution due to lack of productivity. The factory was converted into the steam engine assembly plant and almost half of the finished products were given to the workers as salary remuneration.

Not only had he failed to realize the scene he had envisioned of everyone riding a bike between the city's districts, but also lost a lot of resources due to improper planning—for example, all those

specific machines and equipment used for producing the bike parts were recycled and the remaining half of the bikes, because they were too few to deliver them to the First Army, were stored in a warehouse in the end.

From all the projects that he set up personally, this was the only one that didn't bring any benefit.

That's why he had to erase this black stigma.

Nowadays, the situation in the city was completely different from two or three years ago—a crazy expansion had brought a dramatic increase of the urban areas. Newly constructed districts had been built along Kingdom Main Street and the distance to major workplaces such as factories, docks, and mines was increasing more and more. Walking had become a time-consuming and tiresome activity whereas the perfection of the city streets had allowed the bike riders to easily reach more places.

On the other hand, the productivity of Neverwinter had also been greatly improved. With the application of rubber worms and new machine tools, they could produce the same results as the witches, without any impact on existing projects.

So, now it was a good time to bring up the subject of the bikes.

As long as he let the Second Army follow the group of marathon runners on their bikes and act as guides and accident rescuers, everyone would naturally realize the benefit of this type of transport.

As a result, the biggest mistake he had made since coming into power would no longer exist.

Roland thought with confidence.

...

"Huh? Is this the Great Chief's city?" Guelz Burnflame walked out of the cabin and rubbed his cheeks, "This concrete ship is powerful indeed but it's too noisy. I'd go deaf if I had to stay for another two

to three days.

"Father, are you really not going to hide your face tattoos and then change to some northern kingdom clothes?" Rohan closely followed him and said, "Those people at the docks...everyone is staring at us."

"It doesn't matter, let them stare."

"But..."

"Are you worried about being discriminated?" Guelz glanced at him, "If a Mojin traveler's appearance is so hard for them to accept then what kind of life my daughter is having? The great chief said that in his domain, everyone is the same. I'd like to see if he has lied to the Three Gods."

After the mention of Lorgar Burnflame, Rohan stopped talking and did not try to persuade him anymore.

The chief shook his head secretly. It seemed that his fight-adept sister was still having a heavy influence on him.

Guelz did not come all the way from the Port of Clearwater to here on a whim—the Sand Nation people who decided to move to the small oasis had finally won the revenge battle which lasted for two months, under the guidance of Brian. The masterminds behind the massacre of Silver Stream, the Wildwave clan, and the Cut Bone clan, had been destroyed and the six clan system of the Iron Sand City had since become history.

He was bringing a message from Brian.

Such a task did not have to be carried out by a family leader, but because of the war, the Wildflame clan missed the coronation ceremony of the great chief and so it was only appropriate for him to bring the news of their victory as a late gift in order to show his sincerity.

Guelz was also curious to see how Lorgar was doing.

She would never mention her troubles in her letters so it was best for him to see with his own eyes.

Had she lost weight? As there were no Firelantern Wine or grilled sandworms here.

Chapter 1062: Wildflame's information

After entering the city, the number of people suddenly increased.

Though there were still some people looking at them, it was only out of pure curiosity. Everyone seemed in a hurry and no one was wandering the streets without a purpose.

"Father, this..." Rohan said looking around in surprise.

"Yes." He slightly nodded.

It was the first time that Guelz saw such a busy environment.

He had previously traveled to many cities in the Northern Kingdom, and the biggest impression those cities left him with was their prosperity—this was also a characteristic of the Northern Kingdom: having more prosperous lands and resources than the Southernmost Region allowed them to create extraordinary cities. Additionally, their only difference was that each of them was better than the previous ones. So, at first, he thought that the great chief's King's City would also be superior in this aspect. However, to his surprise, what first attracted his attention was not the flat and long black-stoned streets under the foot, nor the uniform layout of the houses, but the people here.

No matter how big the inner city was, or how magnificent the castle was, there would always be some stray people, beggars or Rats on the side of the streets. They were like a part of a city.

Nonetheless, while walking in the streets of Neverwinter, these kinds of scenes were nowhere to be found. The expressions on people's faces were also completely different. Such high spirited expressions were rarely seen even among the newly promoted clans.

Guelz always thought that the Northern Kingdom people were not much better than the Sand Nation people, who he actually considered as more resourceful due to their less advantageous

environment. The Northern Kingdom, with its abundance of resources, was indulging in overly comfortable life and thus, the courage and will of their people were inferior. If unifying the power of the clans had not been so hard, they could have broadened their place of living.

Yet, he was not so sure about that now.

This kind of pride and self-confidence which came from the heart, it could not be faked.

A city with such citizens, it would be best not to be their enemy even if they did not possess firearms.

"Father, are we going to search for Lorgar first or go to the castle to give the document?" Rohan's impression was not that deep. He was more curious rather than surprised.

"Don't be hasty, if the great chief arranges for us to stay in the Castle District, how are we going to verify his promise?" Guelz looked at him. "We definitely have to wait for few days and find out more about this city.

"But..."

"I already decided." He interrupted him. "Hmm? What are those people doing?"

There was a big crowd around the square, making buzzing sounds and looking very lively.

Rohan followed his gaze and looked at that direction, "Maybe they are rushing to buy discount products from merchants?"

"Go and have a look," Guelz said.

"Yes."

The latter put on his hood, and with the advantage of his big height, he quickly squeezed into the crowd.

Looking at the back of his eldest son, Guelz could not help but sigh. In terms of physique, he was supposed to become the bravest

warrior in the clan. However, fighting was not naturally appealing to him. Eventually, the one to become the pride of the Wildflame clan was Lorgar, who was anything but strong when she was born. It was for this reason that Princess Lorgar was considered by all clan members as the heir, while Rohan could not lift his head from all the pressure. Though they were brother and sister, they rarely had any conversations together. They were like concentric people.

Anyhow, the chief could not help but feel a bit disappointed.

Especially when Lorgar received everyone's appraisal, Rohan still did not show any sign of protesting.

Mojins have a preference for the strong.

Even if one's ability was not good, an unyielding will could still win the respect of others, which was much better than surrendering without even a fight.

That is why even after Lorgar had left, he was still hesitating about him taking over as chief.

Rohan had performed well in other aspects but a leader who is afraid of competition would slowly lose his advantage due to his constant hesitation.

This was the reason Guelz had brought his eldest son with him.

He hoped for him to change through seeing more about the world.

Fifteen minutes later, Rohan quickly squeezed out of the crowd, his face filled with a weird expression. "Father, they are people who want to participate in the Sports meeting."

"Sports meeting?" Guelz murmured, "What's that?"

"Apparently it's a competition that the great chief organized in order to determine the fastest person." Rohan explained, "and the first one will be able to get 100 gold royals as a reward. That's why there are so many people who want to participate."

"Ha, isn't this like the holy duel?" Only without the blood." Guelz smiled. "Looks like the great chief learned a few good things from the Sand Nation. What is the requirement to participate? If it's to determine who is the fastest then we should have the right to participate too."

"Us?" Rohan was startled. "Father, you want to participate too?"

"Of course, I used to be one of those elite warriors who could walk through half of the desert, leaving behind me even camels. When it comes to leg stamina, I never lost to anyone!" Guelz said while stroking his beard. "What, do you think I'm old now? Quickly, take me to register!"

Realizing that he could not stop him, Rohan replied, "There are too many people there, I'll go alone."

"No problem."

"Father—"

"Huh?" Guelz glanced at him. "Is there something that you didn't tell me?"

"Uhm..." Rohan paused for a moment before saying with a low voice, "I saw my third sister."

"In the crowd?"

"No," his eldest son shook his head, "she is...on a picture, wearing clothes that don't cover her entirely, with people circled around, pointing at her..."

"What!" Guelz instantly frowned. Could it be that the great chief was humiliating her? Last time, after writing to Lorgar, Neverwinter responded very quickly. So, he assumed that His Majesty was treating her very well. If Lorgar was being humiliated only for the position of the Wildflame clan, then he would rather not have all those green mountains and rivers.

While thinking about that, he walked towards the crowd with a

serious face.

The painting scroll that Rohan talked about was hung on one side of the square and not only it was very eye-catching but there were actually more than one—when Guelz saw it, he immediately stopped, unable to move his body.

Was that...Lorgar?"

It was the first time that he saw his daughter being so beautiful—she was standing in the middle of a snowy scenery, wearing a white yarn and a brocade which were waving in the wind. That was a palace ceremony dress that Lorgar had never worn before. Whilst in Iron Sand City, she always wore short clothes and pants, which were suitable for fighting. At her chest and arms, she always had bandages and she was always covered either in dirt or blood. When she did not have to fight, she would always cover herself tightly and make sure to hide her inhuman features under her clothes.

This is what Rohan meant as not covered.

Lorgar was clearly exposing her fluffy ears and tail, looking as if she wanted to attract attention deliberately. In one of her long ears, she wore a crystal red gemstone earring and its bright color seemed to make the whole picture look more vivid.

As for the people around, their comments were not out of disgust and repulsiveness but rather compliments. This is what most surprised Guelz. Furthermore, through their chatting, he heard a new word: magic movie.

So that was the case.

"In the Kingdom of Graycastle, everyone is the same" — was this the great chief's way?

He turned around and gave Rohan a slap, "Don't be so shocked next time. Your sister isn't some kind of monster, she just exposed her half-wolf form.

"I didn't say that..." said the latter as if he was wronged while stroking the back of his head.

"Anyways, first go and sign up for that holy duel...sports meeting," Guelz told him. "Afterwards, find out where we can buy the tickets for the magic movie. No matter the cost, you have to buy them. Understood?"

Chapter 1063: The Game Began!

Neverwinter held the first National Sports Meeting on the Victory Day.

Roland had simplified the process of the game, so there was neither an opening ceremony nor a running commentary on the match. However, this could not stop it from becoming a major event in the city.

Early in the morning, everyone spontaneously rushed to the Kingdom Main Street with a little stool or a felt-padded cushion in hand, since they all wanted to grab a nice position to watch the game. Most of them went out with all of their family members. Such a huge stream of people attracted lots of peddlers. They carried snacks and beverages on their backs, peddling along the way.

Considering that most people in the city needed to walk at least 28 kilometers to the middle section of the Kingdom Main Street, where the finish line was located, Roland decided to start the race at 2:00 pm. By doing so, he could allow more time for the spectators to get ready. Still, beyond his expectations, he soon found out that he had underestimated their enthusiasm for this game. By noon, this place had already been tightly surrounded by about 10,000 enthusiastic spectators, and more people were still coming here.

As the king of Graycastle, he did not have to huddle together with the common people. The Ministry of Construction had built a stand next to the street a day before. There were around 100 seats on its platform, which were reserved for the senior officials of Neverwinter. Some soldiers of the First Army also were placed around the stand to ensure their safety.

"Your Majesty, here's the roster of the 1,462 participants." Scroll came up with a thick stack of papers in hand. "But due to the

limited registration time, I only categorized the information and analyzed the data rudimentarily. If I had two more days..."

"That's alright." Roland waved his hand to stop Scroll. "We are holding this sports meeting to boost people's morale for the expedition. We can't afford any delay."

When he glanced through the roster, he found out that Scroll was just being modest. In such a short time, she found out every participant's address and resume and recorded all the information in an orderly way. Roland believed no one else could do a better job.

In the roster, he came across some familiar names.

One was his old buddy, Yorko.

Another one was Lucia's younger sister, Ring.

He also saw the three alchemists from the former capital city's Alchemist Workshop.

He was happy to see them approve the sports meeting's proverb, "the most important thing is to participate", as none of them had any chances of winning the game, even though there were no witches involved in this match.

The names of the participants, who were more likely to win the race, were on the first page.

Roland saw that the top two names were Ferlin Eltek and Carter Lannis. He asked Scroll, "Do you think the champion is going to be either the Morning Light or my Chief Knight?"

Scroll smoothed back her hair and replied with a smile.

"Your Majesty, it's almost time." Barov, who was in a seat below, reminded him.

"Well, let's get started." Roland put down the roster and picked up the telephone next to him.

...

Guelz wore a desert-style fighting robe and was warming up before the game. He asked Rohan, "Do you know what the great chief is going to do to make all the participants in the two regions start running at the same time? The two starting lines are on the opposite sides of one another and all of us will run toward the middle of the street. Fairness is the most important thing in the holy duel. If this race is a little bit unfair, it'll damage the great chief's reputation."

"Who knows. That doesn't matter at all." Rohan complained in his heart before replying with a little embarrassment, "Father... Could you please take that headband off? And the fur around your waist..."

He had never expected that a magic movie, *The Wolf Princess*, would've influenced his father so deeply. They had spent a large sum of money to watch the movie, and since then, his father had become obsessed with the *Wolf Princess*. Recently, he had repeatedly praised Lorgar's beauty and reproached himself for asking her to cover her wolf parts to avoid criticisms. The movie made him realize how stupid and cowardly he was and regretted that he had not done his fatherly duty which was to accept and protect his daughter.

Rohan understood his father's feelings, but he felt really uncomfortable seeing him dressed like this. Guelz wore a headband with a pair of toy wolf ears stitched on it. He also wrapped a strip of fur around his waist as a wolf tail.

"You're the chief of the Wildflame clan! If someone from the Port of Clearwater were to see you dressed so silly and if they were to pass it on to the Mojins, how would you face the other clan chiefs in the future?" Rohan yelled in his heart.

"This is my compensation for her. Don't ask me to take them off again," said Guelz seriously. "The courage she displayed in the magic movie made me feel ashamed. Stick to the road of your choice and never let anyone else's opinion shake your resolve.

That's what I taught her, but I myself failed to do so. The best way to cope with criticism is to confront it. If more and more people are willing to accept this look, they won't think of Lorgar as a monster."

"..." Rohan opened his mouth only to find out that he was lost for words.

"I heard you question the credibility of this match." Suddenly, a voice came from behind. "You aren't from here, right? You've no idea how talented His Majesty is. He's invented something called the telephone to exchange instant messages with people from far away. And did you notice those things above?"

Rohan turned his gaze toward the place the man pointed at and saw two big black cylinders up there. He could hardly think of how they were going to pass messages to the race participants.

"It's called a loudspeaker! It can magnify the sound by several dozens of times. There's another loudspeaker near the start line in Longsong District. They are both connected to His Majesty's telephone. In this way, he can give an order to all the participants at the same time," the man explained proudly.

"Oh! That's great!" Guelz said while clapping his hands. "As long as it's a fair game, I'll try my best to win the match!"

"By the way, uncle. Your body's really strong... The winter's just ended so it's still quite chilly. Aren't you cold in that short robe?" The man looked at Guelz with interest. "And this headband with wolf ears—"

"Oh no, here it is..." Rohan closed his eyes in embarrassment. He assumed that the man was going to ridicule his father's outfit and that his father was going to feel awkward or furiously beat the man up. If that were to happen, they would inevitably make a bad impression on the great chief.

"You're cosplaying the Wolf Princess, aren't you? I like your

outfit..." The man said. "Can you tell me where to buy it?"

What! ?

Rohan could not believe his ears.

"Hahaha, this outfit..."

When Guelz was about to answer the man, a harsh sizzling noise suddenly came out from the loudspeaker—

"Good afternoon, everybody... sizz... I'm Roland Wimbledon."

All the people in the street fell silent.

"I'm sure you already know the rules of the game well. I just want to remind you that the result of the race is not the most important thing. You came here to challenge yourselves. As long as you do your best, you'll be your own hero, whether or not you make it to the end. Remember not to disturb your opponents or play any other tricks in this race. Just focus on your own journey and try to win a prize with your own strength."

"I'll wait for you at the finish line. Wish you all do well in this game."

"Now, please get ready."

"Set, go!"

Chapter 1064: Ten Years of Persistence

In Border District, hundreds of race participants started to run!

They were greeted by cheers all along the Kingdom Main Street as they were running toward Longsong Stronghold. Some police officers who wore uniforms and bright ribbons, bicycled on both sides of the street, following the participants all the way. They worked as judges and relief workers for this long-distance race.

The same situation occurred in Longsong District.

For the first time in this world, more than a thousand people were running toward the same place at the same time. Not out of fear for their lives but to show their strength without any concerns. Undoubtedly, Neverwinter would gain a worldwide reputation for such an unprecedented event.

Soon, everyone on the continent would know that the new king's city of Grayscaslte organized the first long-distance race in the world.

...

At the finish line, on the grandstand, Lance was bending over the handrails, shouting and cheering. Cole turned toward Edith and asked, "Sister, why didn't you join the race? If it's just about endurance, shouldn't you also be able to win a prize?"

Cole noticed that after Lance came to Neverwinter, Edith seemed to be in a better mood and became much more talkative. Most of the time, she would not even tease him in front of their youngest brother. Otherwise, he would never dare to disturb Edith with such a trivial question.

"Oh?" Edith glanced sideways at him. "Why do I have to win such a prize?"

"Uhm— Didn't you really like this kind of competition before?"

"If you hadn't stood out from the competition, you would've never become the Pearl of the Northern Region," Cole thought. In his view, Edith was a super competitive person. Back in the Northern Region, she practiced fencing with knights in the daytime and shone brightly at banquets in the evening. She defeated countless knights single-handedly and attracted lots of admirers on social occasions. Even Timothy was attracted to her.

After winning many fencing matches and outshining numerous ladies at banquets, she finally became a well-known figure in the Northern Region. Cole really could not understand why she suddenly started to keep a low profile and refused to join this long-distance race held by His Majesty.

"Because our family needed me to do that." Edith shrugged. "If I hadn't tried my best to increase the influence of the Kant family as quickly as possible, our father would've never got the duke title. I had to do that, even if I needed to act like a clown in front of those idiots to win their favor." She sneered before adding, "Do you think I enjoyed it?"

Cole could tell it was a threatening tone.

"No, I just..."

"But now, I don't have to rely on this kind of competition to grab the king's attention," Edith continued, seemingly not minding what Cold previously said, which made the boy feel quite relieved. "And... I'm not alone anymore."

Cole was stunned. "What do you mean by that?"

Edith looked at Lance and Cole. "I now have you guys, don't I?"

Hearing that, Cole immediately thrust out his chest. He felt that he should say something at this moment, but he did not know what to say.

Edith smiled at him and then turned her gaze toward the upper part of the grandstand. "Do your job well. That'll be the greatest

help to me."

...

Guelz wheezed violently and began to slow down. "How long... do we still have to run?"

"The sign that we've just passed reads fourteen. That is to say, we've only run half the distance." Rohan felt worried and asked. "Father, are you alright? You're panting heavily. How about we stop here and rest for a while. Anyway, there are many people behind us now."

As Rohan had expected, not many people could keep running for more than an hour. The participants started running as a crowd, and then the crowd gradually turned into a line. At this moment, it was probably a dotted line.

Guelz and Rohan were among the leading runners. Since the beginning of the game, only several participants had surpassed them. Given that, Rohan thought even if they were to take some rest here, they could still do well in the race. He did not care much about the prize.

He was more worried about his father's health.

Guelz had not taken any strenuous exercise for a long time, and this long-distance race turned out to be even more consuming than traveling across a desert. In a desert, they did not need to run very fast. They just followed a planned route and could get food and water from the oases along the way. In this race, however, they needed to use lots of energy to keep a certain speed.

"You want to give up again?" Guelz glared at Rohan. "Because you're not the last one?"

"I..."

"Lorgar would never say anything like that. When are you going to become like her? Try your best to fight for a goal and never give up. Have you ever thought of winning the first prize?"

Rohan usually chose to keep silent when he heard this kind of talk, but today he felt somewhat irritated. He complained in his heart.

How can I defeat Lorgar?

Should I put some poison in her cup? Or publicly expose her half-animal look?

Otherwise, how else can I defeat a Divine Lady favored by the Three Gods?

I can not even defeat our family's Chief Bodyguard!

In order to maintain Wildflame's rank in the Iron Sand City, the clan worshiped outstanding warriors. That was why everyone thought Lorgar was the best successor. Faced with such a reality, Rohan chose to back down to avoid intra-clan conflicts. He did this for the entire clan's interests, but his father did not seem to appreciate it.

He really could not understand why his father always neglected his contribution to the clan.

He had felt oppressed about this for a long time, and now, he thought he really had enough of it. Besides, he was quite embarrassed by his father's wolf girl outfit. Under such circumstances, for the first time in his life, Rohan cried out to his father, "I'm worried about you! If it wasn't for you, I would be at the lead now!"

He felt regret as soon as he finished saying this.

It sounded like he was reproaching his father for dragging him down.

When he was about to say something to make up for his mistake before his father flew into a rage, Guelz said, "Well then, you can run by yourself."

"Father, I mean..." Rohan turned his head to look at Guelz. To his

surprise, he saw a smiling face.

"Is this the first time you took the initiative to reveal your thoughts?" Guelz sighed. "You're right. I'm too old for this race now, no matter how strong I used to be." He paused for a moment before adding, "You can leave me alone and do your best. You're really good at running, aren't you?"

Rohan was frozen with shock.

"There's an old saying in the clan. If you practice a thing for ten years, you'll excel in it, no matter how stupid you are." Guelz paused and then added slowly, "Don't worry. I'll walk to the finish line."

Rohan clenched his fists. After a brief silence, he said in a low voice, "Then I'll go first."

"Wait," Guelz stopped him as he was about to speed up. "Put these two things on."

"Father—"

"Even though Lorgar had already left the Southern Territory, she's still a part of the Wildflame clan and your little sister. We should try our best to help her." Guelz put the headband on Rohan's head and continued, "Go ahead, show the great chief what we Mojins can do."

Rohan looked at his father quietly and then sped off.

As he was picking up the speed, he felt that the wind blowing past him was getting stronger and stronger.

At first, he could hear the spectators exclaim in admiration, but now, he could only hear the wind whistling.

He did not feel tired at all. He thought he could run even faster.

At the moment, he felt full of energy.

He was delighted to know that his father has always kept an eye on him!

In order to guarantee Lorgar's status, he suffered countless criticisms, both inside and outside of the clan. Whenever he felt overwhelmed by the pressure, he would leave the Iron Sand City to run in the small oases alone. He did this not only to vent his resentment but also to prove himself. He was not good at fighting, but he thought he might be able to outshine his sister in hunting, which required endurance rather than strength.

Unfortunately, he never got a chance to do it.

Rohan thought that no one noticed his attempt at proving himself, but now he knew he was wrong.

"You're really good at running, aren't you?"

"If you practice a thing for ten years, you'll excel in it, no matter how stupid you are."

His father's words reverberated in his heart.

Father, you knew it from the very beginning, didn't you?

Feeling encouraged, Rohan ran even faster.

He still remembered the day when he had first started running in the oases.

Ten years had passed since that day!

Chapter 1065: The Champion

"Look, that's him, Morning Light!" shouted someone at the roadside.

"Where is he?"

"He's the one there in front!"

After a girl pointed out where Ferlin Eltek was, the crowd started to get excited.

"It is him! I thought I would never see him again after he left his teaching job."

"Wow, he looked at me!"

"Come on, Mr. Eltek!"

Many people cheered for this tall handsome man, Ferlin Eltek, who still maintained a steady pace during the final leg of the race. Although he looked tired, he still smiled back at the people who cheered for him along the way, and he even waved to his former students. All his fans were completely smitten by him.

Seeing this, Honey, who followed the Border District participants all along way, started to think about her race report.

Ferlin Eltek, widely known as the Morning Light, works in the General Staff Department. He was a very popular knight and then a very popular intermediate teacher. Now, it seems that he's about to become the champion of the long-distance race. If that happens, how should I write the report title?

"Today, Thousands of Girls in Neverwinter Fell for a Man', how do you like this title?"

"Ugh... Are you asking me?" Vader, who was riding a bicycle, carrying Honey, panted and said, "Thousands of girls? Doesn't that sound too exaggerated?"

Though Honey looked like a little girl, Vader dared not to look

down upon her, since she was in charge of the Ministry of Public Relations and Communications and reported directly to the king. He also knew that she was a close friend of Wendy, the manager of the Witch Union.

He had worked at the bottom of a patrol team for several years and had learned his lesson. He would never offend a person in such a high position.

Given that, he had warmly received Honey and had immediately agreed to her request to take a ride on his bike. Since Carter took part in the race, Vader was in charge of security for the race. He often acted on Carter's behalf to handle matters in the police force when the Chief Knight was away.

As an experienced policeman, he clearly understood the importance of intelligence. If the Security Bureau wanted to eliminate all the hidden dangers and threats to His Majesty and the kingdom, they needed the best information service in the country, which could only be provided by Honey.

Therefore, he decided to try his best to impress this witch.

"You don't worry too much about the details," Honey smacked her lips and said. "Would you want to immediately read the whole story if you came across a title like that?"

"Yes, I would," Vader replied honestly.

"So that's why," The little girl said and then whistled cheerfully.

At that moment, they heard different voices cry out from the crowd.

"Don't you think the second runner is also very... handsome?" a lady said while covering her mouth with a hand.

"You noticed him too? I think he looks even better than the Morning Light." Another woman echoed and so did lots of people around them.

"I know him! He's the king's Chief Knight, Carter Lannis! Look at the royal emblem on his cloak!"

"Oh, the king's Chief Knight! No wonder he looks so great!"

"But he's cold toward everyone, as if we owed him a big debt..."

"Alas, you're just too young to understand it. Cool and talented men are more attractive."

"Look, he's catching up!"

"Come on, Chief Knight—"

Carter Lannis had served in the knightage of the old King's City. He followed Prince Roland to Border Town and was among the founding members of Neverwinter. It was said that he could compete with an Extraordinary witch. Scroll thought this outstanding warrior was one of the favorites to win the race.

Honey wrote down all the messages brought back by her birds.

Carter increased his pace, rapidly shortening the distance between him and Ferlin.

The cheer he received was as loud as any given to Morning Light.

Honey found that she needed to change the title of her report.

After a moment of thinking, she began to write cheerfully.

—"Who's the Final Winner? The Battle Between Two Handsome Men"

...

Carter had a burning feeling in his chest.

In order to let May spot him easily, he had put on a bright ribbon and a knight's cloak. He had thought that these things were as light as a feather, but now he felt that they were as heavy as a mountain. He felt as if they were pulling him backward while was running against a wind.

Despite that, he still refused to take them off.

Because they were hand-made by May.

Carter hoped to cross the finish line in this outfit before Morning Light.

He had heard some rumors about Ferlin and May from the troupe members. Morning Light had become a household name in the Western Region long before Prince Roland came here. Back then, everyone had thought that he and the Star of the Western Region could not be more perfectly matched. It was said that May had feelings for Morning Light, but Ferlin had already fallen in love with a new actress, Irene.

Carter had never heard May mention it, but he somehow still held a grudge against Ferlin.

What's so great about Morning Light?

May liked you just because she didn't have a chance to meet me back then.

Carter wanted to prove to everyone that he was the best for May!

That was why he wanted to overtake Ferlin Eltek so badly.

Carter tensed his muscles and quickened his pace. Ferlin was only half a step ahead of him.

And he could see the stand beside the finish line now.

It was time for a final push!

Suddenly, he heard someone else rapidly approaching behind him.

Is there someone who can catch up with us?

How is this possible? In the first hour of the race, Ferlin and I left all the other participants in the dust. No one should have been able to catch up with us. Even if he deliberately saved energy at the beginning of the race, he should've started to speed up little by little a long time ago.

Sprinting consumes much more energy than running at a consistent pace!

Carter could not help looking back.

"Wait... What's that?"

He saw a strangely dressed man approaching him at an incredibly fast speed. From the man's skin color and tattoos, he could tell that he was a Mojin, but he had never seen a Mojin man with a tail and a pair of long ears on his head.

Is he trying to gain strength by imitating some wild beast?

He shuddered at the thought, and then dashed toward the finish line as fast as he could, as if a dreadful monster was after him.

Ferlin, Carter, and Rohan crossed the finish line at almost the same time. The spectators burst into cheers.

Did I... win?

The Chief Knight thought while panting heavily. Because of inertia, he continued to run several dozens of meters before he finally stopped. After he stopped, he immediately looked up toward the stand.

Roland Wimbledon stood up.

"Congratulations! You've successfully completed the long-distance race and achieved great results!" the king spoke to all the people through the loudspeaker. "The game is not over, but we've got the top three runners now. They are—"

Carter swallowed hard.

"Carter Lannis, who finished in third place."

Hearing that, the Chief Knight closed his eyes in great disappointment. Oh, hell, was I still a little bit slower than Morning Light?

"Rohan Burnflame, a Mojin man, who finished in second place."

Roland paused for a moment, giving the spectators a moment to cheer. When the crowd quieted down, he raised his voice again.

"And the champion is Sunflower from Longsong District! Let's give them a warm round of applause!"

"Huh... who's she?"

While everyone else was shouting and clapping their hands, Carter, Ferlin, and Rohan stood agape.

On the side of the street, Honey closed her notebook and hopped off Vader's bike. "I've finished today's report. Thank you very much."

"Did you decide on the headline?" Vader asked.

"Yeah, I did." She smiled before adding, "I'll just directly write out the results."

It was already eye-catching enough.

—"The First Victory Day Games Concluded Successfully: A Twenty-year-old Girl, Sunflower, Won First Place."

Chapter 1066: The Prewar Speech

"Wow, it's fantastic," Barov exclaimed while stoking his beard. "I never expected a long-distance race to be so thrilling!"

"Indeed. I felt my heart racing when those three guys were running neck-and-neck toward the finish line," said Petrov, the governor of Longsong District. "Unfortunately, only the champion can get the souvenir badge. What a pity."

"Is it really a pity for you?" The City Hall Director smiled before adding, "The champion is from Longsong District. If I were you, I couldn't have too many regrets like that."

"Come on, Ms. Sunflower was just lucky. If nothing else, you'll get what you want at next year's Victory Day Games."

"Really? I'm a little worried that something unexpected will happen."

"Aha, if it happens all the time, then it's not an unexpected thing."

Hearing these two veteran politicians, who had a 20-year age difference, having a nice chat with many subtle jabs woven in, Roland thought, "Well, well, you guys are so well-matched. Both of you are amazingly skilled at debate."

After Roland announced the top three runners of the race, all the spectators felt more relaxed. They continued talking about the match in low voices, while waiting for the other participants to cross the finish line. Apparently, everyone was deeply attracted to this sports competition, which catered to their desire to see people push themselves to the limit of human endurance.

Even the witches, who had superhuman abilities, were caught up in the competition.

Seeing the girls so excited, Roland could not help smiling.

Considering that their magical powers might discourage regular people from participating, he forbade them and the God's Punishment Witches from taking part in the race. But now, he was thinking that he should hold a special game for the witches.

What will happen if I organize a special sports competition for them?

"Is this what sporting events look like in your previous world?" Anna's voice interrupted his thought. "In the first half of the race, you seemed a little bit distracted."

"Because I couldn't see or hear what was happening in the race," Roland sighed.

"Are you saying that there was a way to instantly let people know what was happening during a match in your previous world?" Anna's eyes shone with excitement. "How did you do that?"

"That's a little bit complicated," he replied with a smile. "Do you remember the television that I told you?"

Despite the race not being broadcast live on television or having someone to give a running commentary, it was still a successful event. It was exciting and suspenseful, with its result being totally unexpected. It attracted lots of spectators and many participants in this game had his or her own unique style, such as Carter, who wore a knight's cloak, or Rohan, who cosplayed the wolf girl, both of whom were among the most talked-about figures today.

As for the champion, Sunflower, she also seemed to have legendary life experiences. According to Scroll's roster, she had been a Rat on Black Street, and then she became a mail carrier after Roland took control of Longsong Stronghold. Since then, she had been running in the streets and lanes of Longsong District every day to deliver mail. Because of this, she outshone all her opponents and won this long-distance race.

She was not as strong as Ferlin, Carter or Rohan, but she was the

champion. This result was completely outside of everyone's expectations, but it pleased Roland. Her victory embodied the hope of many ordinary workers and made them believe that hard work could really change their fate.

...

When the sun began to set, the first National Sports Event was drawing to an end.

The spectators flocked to the stands to watch the award ceremony.

For Roland, this was the most important part of today's event.

He stood up and nodded to Echo, then stepped forward to stand at the front of the stage.

Neverwinter was going to wage a war against demons in the Taquila ruins. To boost his people's morale, he decided to give a prewar speech to them at this ceremony.

He looked down and saw a sea of faces. Seeing the king, the crowd gradually quieted down.

"Citizens of Graycastle, you've just witnessed a miraculous race. In less than four hours, many participants ran 28 kilometers, which is exactly half the length of Kingdom Main Street."

"I want to remind you all, especially the new residents, that in the past, it took us at least three days to travel from Border Town to Longsong Stronghold and we had to travel day and night to do so. Back then, if someone told you that he could run to Longsong Stronghold in a day, you would think it was a joke. But today, you've witnessed it!"

"Citizens of Graycastle, you've already created many miracles. You're able to run 28 kilometers in less than four hours. You're capable of building roads through mountains and many other great projects in this city. For you, anything is possible and nothing can stop you from achieving greater success!"

The crowd burst into cheers.

Roland paused to give the people a sign to quiet down. After that, he continued, "Now, we're faced with a brand new challenge, demons. We've arrived at a crucial juncture in our war against them. Soon, the First Army will go deep into the Fertile Plains and wage war against the demons at Taquila once again."

"Demons are the most brutal and greedy invaders we've met. They've destroyed many thriving kingdoms and massacred millions of people. Wherever they have been, cities and towns crumbled into ruin, and bodies were piled up like hills!"

"So we must fight before such a disaster strikes!"

"We will fight them on land; we will fight them on the sea; we will fight them in the sky. We will fight until demons no longer exist in this world. And then, no one will threaten our survival anymore!"

"I'm so glad to spot some Mojins and people from other lands among you. I enjoy seeing you dispel prejudices and barriers and to form a close-knit community. I promise you that this is going to be the new normal! Demons intend to eliminate all human beings, men, women, and children, no matter where you come from or how old you are. In this war, we fight not only for Graycastle, but we fight for the entire human race!"

"My fellow citizens, when you feel fear in front of dreadful enemies, think about today's miracle. As long as we have faith in each other and stick together to the end, we will certainly win!"

"Now, let's welcome the top 10 runners to the stage to receive their awards!" Roland announced loudly.

The crowd burst into cheers once again, and this time, the people cheered much louder and longer. The ceaseless cheers and applause reverberated around the stands.

"The great chief is such a good speaker..." Guelz, who stood

beside the stand, took a deep breath and said, "I can't wait to go into battle after hearing his speech." He looked at Rohan and asked, "Are you ready to go on stage and receive your prize?"

"Father, but I..." Rohan bit his lip and looked sad.

"But you didn't win first prize?" Guelz grinned and rubbed his son's head. "You tried your best. That's enough. Go up there and stand tall. Let everyone marvel at what the successor of the Wildflame clan has achieved."

Rohan was startled. He looked at his father quietly and then nodded his head vigorously.

He strode toward the stage and did not feel embarrassed to be wearing the wolf girl outfit anymore.

Guelz watched his back in the glow of the setting sun. He found that his son looked tall and confident now, just like Lorgar.

Chapter 1067: 1067 The Person Pursuing Miracles

...

"Good gracious, it's really you!"

When Sunflower stepped down from the stands with a bag full of gold royals in her hand, she heard a familiar voice.

She turned around and a smile fluttered over her face. "Hey, Tigerclaw!"

"Haha, it has been such a long time, Sunflower!" The big man gave her a big hug and patted her on the back heartily. "When His Majesty announced that name, I thought it was someone else. I didn't expect you would defeat the Chief Knight and Morning Light. You really surprised me! Hang on... you look plumper, don't you?"

Sunflower pushed Tigerclaw away and punched him in the chest smilingly. She immediately shot back, "Oh, shut up! I'm just a little plumpy. Do you actually like the skinny me better?"

"No, I like you to be a bit plumpy." Tigerclaw whistled. "At least, you look more like a girl." With these words, he studied Sunflower up and down and said, "But you did change a lot, to be honest... I wasn't even sure if it was really you on stage earlier."

"Really?" Sunflower shrugged. "My hair has gotten longer, and I eat more, too. Didn't you get bigger as well?"

"I work out at the construction site every day!" said Tigerclaw as he lifted his arm triumphantly.

"Sun...sun... Sunflower, wait for me." Dawn pushed his way through the crowd, completely out of breath. "Hey, isn't it Tigerclaw?"

"See? This guy hasn't changed much. He's as skinny as he used to

be." Tigerclaw also gave him a crushing hug and said, "Don't tell me you ran all the way here."

"Ahem... be gentle," Dawn replied with a bitter smile. "The caravan offered me a ride. If Sunflower didn't force me to come with her, I wouldn't have bothered taking such a trip."

"Are you a merchant now?"

"Just an errandboy." Dawn scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

"He knows how to read and write." Sunflower cut in while twitching her lips. "As he was a fast learner in the elementary school, a Chamber of Commerce hired him right after the exam. Now, he deals with accounting books every day and is living very comfortably."

"I see. it's good that you came. I'm happy to see you guys." Tigerclaw laughed. "Let's have a sip in Neverwinter tonight. We should celebrate Sunflower's victory!"

"Sounds good, but..." Dawn looked around and asked, "Where's Snaketooth? Didn't he come for the competition?"

Sunflower's heart suddenly started to pound in her throat.

She had wanted to ask the same question for a long time, but she tried not to look so eager. So, she turned to Tigerclaw and tried to sound as airy as possible. "I hope he's not annoyed that you totally ditched him and went back."

"Oh him... He went to build the railways at Misty Forest." Tiger said drawly. "Although it's well paid, the work is too dangerous. What's the point of trading your own life for money? I don't understand him. He used to be happy even with just living down in the drainage. Now he's fussy about a real dwelling and insists on a double-roomed house."

"Because a double-roomed house can provide a cozy home for a family rather than just a shelter," thought Sunflower bitterly.

Then she said, "He did so obviously for Paper."

"Paper?" Tigerclaw asked blankly.

"Hey, how can you forget Paper?" Dawn nudged him in his ribs. "She's our friend."

"I know, but what does it have to do with her?" Tigerclaw was confused. "Paper has joined the Witch Union and is now living in the Castle District. She doesn't need an extra house. And silly Snaketooth... he saw Paper many times but didn't even have the guts to say hello to her. He even pulled me aside to dodge her. Now Paper doesn't even know we're here."

"What?" Sunflower was stunned. "Haven't you met Paper yet in the past two years?"

Tigerclaw shook his head off-handedly.

"Hahaha." Sunflower grinned broadly. "Then he's silly indeed!" For some reason, Sunflower felt much relieved as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She had to fight the urge to jump into the air and whoop.

"Sunflower, keep your voice down." Dawn reminded her while feeling a little uneased. "People are watching us."

But Sunflower did not care about it at all. She waved at the crowd who smiled back.

Everybody undoubtedly viewed her as Ms. Champion.

"It feels so good to be a celebrity..." Tigerclaw remarked impressively. "Two years ago, I would have never thought we'd be famous one day."

"I'm more interested in the 100 gold royals than fame." Dawn apparently had a different opinion. "We can invest the money in some businesses. We would definitely earn more than working for others. Even if we know nothing about starting a business, we can partner with a member of the Chamber of Commerce. If it works

out, we can practically earn money by doing nothing..."

"No, I want to buy a house." Sunflower interjected. "In the Border Area."

"Huh?" Dawn was astonished. "This is a perfect opportunity! Do you know how long it would take to earn 100 gold royals if we start from scratch?"

"I know, but I've made up my mind," Sunflower said resolutely.

"Then what about your job?"

"I'm also planning to purchase a bicycle," Sunflower went on. "You see, it's so convenient to have a bicycle. It would only take a day... no, half a day to ride to the Longsong Area from here. Plus, many people from these two areas write letters. I can probably earn more with a bicycle."

"You..." Dawn gazed at her for a long time. At length, he sighed resignedly and said, "Fine. I've never managed to persuade you anyway."

Sunflower gave a faint smile. She remembered what it had been like two years ago.

It was on the day of their departure.

They had been at the dock when she had asked Snakestooth if he and Paper would ever come back, but nobody had given an answer.

At that time, she had the impression that she would never see him again.

Longsong Stronghold was so far away from Border Town that she felt there was a world between them, even though the two cities had merged into one.

They had never been anywhere farther than the landfill outside Longsong Stronghold.

And Border Town was somewhere even farther away.

Tempted by the huge reward given to the champion of the sports meeting, Sunflower had finally made her decision to come to Longsong Stronghold. It was actually her first time setting foot on the Kingdom Main Street. To inject more courage into herself, she had also asked Dawn to join her.

Sunflower was actually more surprised at how close the two cities were to each other than her winning the championship. The distance was absolutely shorter than she had anticipated. It was a straight flat road without any curves, twists or portholes like many mountain roads. For the first time of her life, she had realized that it really was a city.

So, why did she have to wait for Snaketooth to come back?

She could just go there herself.

Just as His Majesty had said.

People needed to break through the impossible because no one knew whether there would be a miracle unless they tried.

"Let's find a tavern and have a drink," suggested Sunflower as she patted her money pouch.

"Yay!" Tigerclaw wrung his fist out in excitement. "Too bad Snaketooth isn't here. He'll miss all the fun."

"Remember to store the money away in the hotel." Dawn reminded Sunflower. "Just take four or five gold royals with you!"

"Got it," said Sunflower smilingly.

She didn't know the outcome but she was willing to give it a shot.

She started to like the feeling of pursuing a miracle.

Chapter 1068: A Torch Run

The next morning after the sports meeting, Roland entered the parlor and met the officials who were waiting there. They all rose as Roland came in.

"Please take a seat," said Roland as he seated himself in the host chair. He surveyed the room before speaking solemnly, "You've probably all learnt about the reason for this meeting. I now declare that the war has officially begun!"

"This isn't something you just throw onto the armies. As of this moment, I require every governmental body and every department director of the Administrative Office to have a basic understanding of the war as well as the future political and military trend. I require every one of you to work hard and fight this prolonged battle together!" The whip was in Roland's voice. "We've had many great achievements since the establishment of Neverwinter. However, nothing would last if we lose the Battle of Divine Will. If we fail to take the Taquila ruins, the Red Mist will spread throughout the whole continent in no time. By then, nothing would be able to stop the demons. Therefore, we must win. We lose, we fail!"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Barov and the others shouted in a chorus.

"Very well." Roland then turned to Edith and said, "Now the General Staff will talk about the detailed tactics and strategies."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the Pearl of the Northern Region replied as she stood up. She placed her hand on her chest gracefully and continued, "I'll have to use the big map for my presentation."

She walked to Roland and tapped the map of the Western Region on the wall behind her. After numerous amendments and additions, the map portrayed more than half of the inhabited Barbarian Land, and Neverwinter had become a tiny dot on the edge of the map rather than in its center. Anybody who looked at

the map would soon realize how small a thing a man was. This was also one of Roland's primary goals while drafting the map.

He wanted his ministers and officials to understand the littleness of human beings and thus focus on the long-term goal instead of immediate gains.

Edith went straight to the point. "First of all, we need you all to know that this upcoming battle will be different from any of the ones we've had in the past. I want everybody to understand that this will be a prolonged war."

The vision blocking tactic used in the battle at the North Slope would not work anymore. Since the Taquila ruins were much farther from the Misty Forest than the destroyed outpost, it would take months to build the railways there. As such, the demons would definitely notice what they were doing.

As the demons had an absolute positional advantage on the vast continent, Roland decided to take the advantage of his military strength and have a direct fight with the demons instead of launching a surprise attack.

Beyond a doubt, this was going to be a battle between the attacking and the defending.

Nobody was surprised at Edith's proposal, as they had all known the plan beforehand.

Only Barov raised a question. "How long do you estimate this war will take?"

"That depends on how fierce the counterattack is," Edith answered nonchalantly. "The General Staff has asked the Taquila witches to conduct several maneuvers. Suppose the demons fight in the same way they did during the Battle of North Slope and attack us once a week, we would be able to slam the Longsong Cannons in their faces within three months."

"But they aren't stupid, and they certainly won't make the same

mistake over and over again."

"Exactly. I anticipate that the demons would soon realize what the railways are used for. Perhaps, they would even detect the railways at the rear of Misty Forest. But we are also taking precautions. Since there are a lot of variables in a battle, I hope the Administrative Office will allocate the resources based on the worst possible scenario."

"And the worst scenario is...?" asked Barov as he drew his brows together.

"From spring all the way to winter, until the arrival of the Months of Demons," said Edith flatly.

"Then doesn't that mean we've failed already?" Barov the chief grimaced. "This doesn't meet His Majesty's requirement."

"As long as we don't retreat, the battle isn't over. We are just deadlocked." The Pearl of the Northern Region smiled faintly. "The battle will continue after the snow melts." Seeing all the directors from the Administrative Office look a bit apprehensive, Edith comforted them, "But this is highly unlikely, for we produce bullets way faster than the demons reproduce themselves. This is just the worst scenario."

Barov said meditatively, "In that case, I'll need to collect food from all the other regions of the country for a war reserve stock. As Golden Twos are currently grown in all parts of the kingdom, I believe there will be a lot of excesses this year. These excesses would sustain the First Army for a year."

"That won't be a problem," Sirius Daly, the Minister of Agriculture replied. "I'll let all the local city halls know."

"The plan for the Ministry of Chemical Industry needs a bit of adjustment as well," Barov continued. "We'll need more gunpowder and explosives."

"We only have this many people. The production of gunpowder

and explosives won't go up unless we decrease the production of perfumes and soap." Kyle Sichi, the Minister of Chemical Industry said off-handedly.

"Perhaps we can loan some alchemy apprentices from the neighboring country to support Graycastle..." Kyle suggested as he looked at Roland. "I've heard that there are many alchemical workshops in the Kingdom of Dawn, although none of them are in the City of Glow. But if Your Majesty requests, I'm sure the King of Dawn would fully support you and allow you to have these people as long as you need them. Besides... there are over 100 soldiers from the First Army stationed around Cage Mountain. You may also get some alchemists from the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter."

"Sounds like a plan." Roland nodded in satisfaction. "I want a proposal from you."

He was very pleased with Kyle's answer.

Roland had initially thought that it would probably take two to three years to see the result of his political reform when he had united the kingdom. After all, it was very hard to change a person's mindset. For decades, these officials had been used to submitting to the rule of their lords and sticking to the tradition that no lords should interfere with the affairs of other domains. All of sudden, however, they had been given the opportunity to manage all the other regions in the country. Such a drastic change must have been overwhelming.

Yet he had underestimated the magic of power.

When a person was suddenly granted considerable power, he would naturally attempt to exercise it even though he might not be able to see the implication behind it. The best example was Barov.

Not only did he think of the Kingdom of Dawn, but he also planned to obtain more resources from farther locations with the help of the military.

After everybody finished their discussion, Edith continued, "It's not enough just to destroy the demons' encampment. Due to some reasons, we have to exterminate them. Therefore, we need to cut off the enemies' retreat before the general offensive, including their air force and ground force, and only the witches can do that."

"Some... reasons?" Barov sounded confused. "It would put the witches in great danger if they stayed at the rear."

"Because of the curse." Roland cut in. "There's a Senior Demon among the enemies who can put magic curses on us from a distance. I haven't figured out how it does that yet, but it might be very similar to Blackveil, the Church witch. If it escapes, the First Army would be doomed. Even if we do win, it would be just barely."

Everybody in the hall sucked in their breath.

The witch, Blackveil, was notorious for her incredible but powerful killing method. She could put a person to death instantly with a mere eye contact. More than 700 people from the First Army had been killed upon her fatal stare. It was the biggest loss the Army had suffered since its establishment.

If the demon could also kill people through eye contacts, needless to say, they should eradicate this threat as soon as possible.

Roland cast a glance at Lightning at the end of the long table who hanged her head miserably before he let out a silent sigh.

He completely understood how she felt.

Lightning was mortified to see that all the other witches would have to risk their lives for her sake.

But they had no better choice.

Roland rose to his feet and said, "Anyway, the purpose of this expedition is to eliminate the threat posed by the Obelisk before the Battle of Divine Will while at the same time weakening the demons. The operation code is 'Torch', which not only represents

our hope to destroy our enemies but also the light that brightens up the Fertile Plains. Please do your best to expand the territory of Graycastle!"

Everybody stood up and bowed respectfully.

They shouted in a chorus, "As you command, Your Majesty."

Chapter 1069: In the Name of the Aerial Knight

Inside the pilot training school in Neverwinter.

"Hurry up! Hurry up! Keep your balance!"

"Your legs are even shakier than a baby's!"

"Keep straight. Watch where you're heading!"

"Hey, where are you going? Do I really have put some braziers on either side of the walkway to make you all be more careful!"

"Not here, not on the plank, otherwise I'll have to make you lick your vomit off it!"

"Next, Good!"

"Here!" Good shuddered when he heard his name being called. He took a deep breath and seated himself in a swivel chair.

The stern face of Eagle Face, the instructor, came into his sight.

Good could not even stand having mere eye contact with him. It was rumored Eagle Face had once been the commander of the garrison in the Northern Region before he had returned to Neverwinter. He had immediately taken the internal military assessment and became a member of the reserve Aerial Knights. This meant that Eagle Face had not only participated in the war against the church but had also sacrificed his vacations for the new trainees.

In other words, he was strict to both others and himself.

Good felt very uncomfortable under his penetrating stare.

As soon as he sat down, his two friends, Finkin and Hinds grouped up.

Good saw them cast him a sorrowful look.

The next moment, the chair started to spin rapidly.

This was the most painful training session for the reserve pilots. There was a plank five meters long, as wide as a palm, in front of the chair, which Eagle Face called a "footbridge". All the trainees had to walk the "footbridge" as steadily as possible after spinning in the chair for half a minute.

Due to the loss of balance, the whole world became a swirl of color after he slid off the chair. He could barely stand still, let alone crossing the "footbridge". Eagle Face would usually train ten people at a time, and the person who got the lowest grade would be subject to punishment such as "cleaning the washroom" and "weeding the yard". Sometimes, he would pick a weekend and have the poor guy sit in the spinning chair for a whole day as a way of disciplining.

Unfortunately, Good had once been that unlucky person.

As a result, he had ended up throwing up in his dormitory at dinner time.

He did not want to experience this for a second time.

"Stop!"

The chair immediately stopped as Eagle Face announced the magic word. Good struggled to get off the chair.

"Hurry up! Don't dawdle. Walk!"

Good raised his head with his teeth clenched. He stepped on the plank shakily and started to walk toward the other end of the "footbridge". After more than ten days of practice, he had found a little trick to succeed in the task. He noticed that he would be more likely to lose his balance if he constantly watched his steps. The best way to cross the "footbridge" was to look ahead and use his body's memory to control his strides.

In fact, his feet touched the solid ground before he realized it.

"That's, that's amazing..."

"He didn't miss a single step!"

"He's the first person who did it, isn't he?"

The crowd behind him broke into a loud buzz.

He turned around and looked at Eagle Face. There was a rare smile on his gaunt grim face. "Well done. It seems that you aren't completely hopeless."

"But—" he paused for a second and his tone instantly dropped, "there has been only one person who passed the test up to this date, which means this group is the worst of them all. Princess Tilly said the Aerial Knights should be one in a million. If you don't want to be an errand boy for the rest of your life, put yourself together and train harder. Take a five-minute break and we'll start again!"

Everybody wailed at the announcement.

"Hey, how did you do that?" Finkin asked Good while winking.

"Just walk the way you normally do like when you aren't dizzy."

"Really? How?" Hinds rejoined. "Are you saying to live the lie in your head?"

Both Finkin and Hinds had passed the initial assessment and joined the reserve together with Good. As the three were in the same training group, they had soon become very close friends.

"Just do what I said. We just need a pass." Good tapped Hind's head. "This method probably doesn't work for the smart ones, but I think it should work for you guys."

"Get over yourself," Finkin retorted with a little irritation. "You just succeeded once. Stop bragging."

"Do you want to make a bet? I bet I'll walk over the bridge for another three... no, five times!"

"If you do, I'll do all your laundry this week!"

"Including my underpants?"

"Um..."

"Hey, you guys stop arguing," Hinds cut in. "What I really care about is— can we really become an Aerial Knight after this training program?"

Good and Finkin instantly fell silent. In fact, this was the very problem that bothered all the trainees. All the training they had received so far, including walking the footbridge, passing the rotating wheel, and learning wind directions, were more like an acrobatic show than proper military training. Furthermore, Princess Tilly was supposed to teach them in person, but in the end, she had simply taught some senior officers from the First Army and asked those officers to teach them.

The training was pretty intense. They had to go through physical training during the daytime and learn to read and write at night. Although Princess Tilly had made her promise to all of them, they still doubted the credibility of her words.

However, nobody dared raise the question to the sulky, unapproachable instructor.

"Who knows?" Finkin said with a shrug, after a short silence. "At least, the food here is good. We have meat every day, with an extra meal on weekends as well."

"I think... Her Highness is not likely to lie to us," Good said thoughtfully. "Didn't we get a bag of books? My sister told me one of them is called something like "Aircraft Operation Manual", which was drafted by Her Highness herself. Once we learn how to read and write, we would probably know the reason for these trainings."

"You are pretty optimistic, aren't you?" Finkin beamed at him.

"If I thought negatively, I probably wouldn't have survived the

trip here."

"Alright, time's up!" Just then, Eagle Face's voice rose abruptly above the murmurs of the crowd. "Line up here. We're going to do it again in the same order in which we did last time!"

"OK..." responded everybody weakly.

But something unexpected happened.

The door of the training room was flung open and a uniformed man strode in. He whispered something in Eagle Face's ear.

Eagle Face nodded. After administering a salute, he wheeled around and swept over the trainees with a cold glance.

"Good news for all of you. The subsequent training is cancelled. You can continue to take your break now."

Finkin and Hinds heaved a sigh of relief, but Good did not. He clearly saw a calculating smile break across Eagle Face's shrewd face. It was a smile which contained a little bit of sarcasm, jesting, and even... gloating.

"Not here though." As Good had expected, Eagle Face went on at once, "I know what you're complaining about in private. I didn't bother explaining to you because I know your thick skulls wouldn't understand a thing. You're indeed lucky. Now, there's a chance for you to see what an Aerial Knight truly means with your own eyes."

The true meaning of... an Aerial Knight?

Good's heart was pumping insubordinately.

"Follow me." Eagle Face surveyed them slowly and said, "I hope you don't wet your pants when you see it."

Chapter 1070: The Glider (I)

They filed out of the training room and marched along the pavement toward the south.

There were brand new red brick houses along the road, some were just completed and some were half-done. According to Finkin, it had been a coastal wasteland here just a year ago, with nothing but a few tree trunks here and there. Now, the construction team had turned this place into a "city within a city".

The city was walled. Although the hedge was not high, it was tall enough to set a boundary between the city and the rest of the world. A warning sign which read "No climbing. Offenders will be shot down" was hung on the wall, keeping those who attempted to climb over the hedge away from this area.

There were several dormitories, cafeterias, playgrounds, training rooms and classrooms in this enclosure. It had actually taken Good a full day to completely understand what those weird words meant. In short, they lived and studied in here, cut off from contact with the outside world, leading an exclusive lifestyle which their instructor referred to as a "closed system".

The enclosure was pretty big. Good had been here for several weeks, but he still did not know where the edge of the hedge was. One of the reasons for this was that the trainees were confined within the area between their dormitories and the playground. They were forbidden to go anywhere else unless given special permission.

It should be noted that the construction of the school had been completed within just a year.

Good had known a long time ago that Neverwinter was famous for its monstrous speed of building houses. However, he had no idea how fast it actually was until he moved to the "city within a city" in the Western Region this winter.

It had only taken them one week to complete a red bungalow on the south side of the playground.

Compared to other cities, the work efficiency here was phenomenal.

After they crossed the playground, the group suddenly erupted into a loud murmur.

This was a restricted area normally forbidden to the students.

For the first time, they saw what this area looked like. Their view was filled with nothing but a vast open field. All they could see was the blue sky above dotted with puffs of white clouds. A short way farther on, they saw the endless Swirling Sea. A cold sea breeze brushed upon Good's cheeks, instantly reviving his spirit.

Used to the familiar view of dense red brick houses, Good felt the whole world instantly expand in front of him.

"Strange... I thought there would be something marvelous here," Hinds mumbled. "Isn't it just a clearing?"

He was right. It was a clearing with nothing but a few blackstone tracks, wider than the main street in Neverwinter, which stretched away to the east and west.

No wonder Hinds did not understand why it was a restricted area.

"Probably because they feared we'd be too absorbed in this beautiful view to pay attention to the road underneath and fall into the sea." Finkin grinned. "But I think I'll be more willing to learn if our classroom is here."

"But you have no desire to learn at all in the first place," someone jested.

"Hey, do you want to make a bet?" Finkin stared back. "Let's see who had a higher grade in the past exam?"

"Drop it. Look over there!" Good raised his brows. "Someone's

already here."

"They're from the other class..." At these words, the whole group fell silent. Although they had not talked to the other class, they had heard a lot about them from their instructor, who constantly spoke highly of their performances. They not only completed all the tasks assigned to them during the day but also requested for more in the evening. Some of them insisted on sitting in the chair even though they had vomit all over. They were the so-called top students who simply beat them in every subject, making them look like a bunch of dunces.

They thus automatically viewed the students from the other class as their rivals.

"Raise your head."

"Stare right into their eyes. We don't want to lose to them!"

They started to encourage each other.

Meanwhile, the other group of students looked just as intense as them.

Sensing the glares, those students all gazed at them coldly, long-faced, looking nothing like model students.

The tension between the two groups was not reduced until they had parted.

"Alright, you all wait here," Eagle Face bellowed as he stopped at the blackstone track. "Remember, you're not allowed to leave your spot no matter what you see. Both His Majesty and Her Highness will be here. Any frivolous action would be viewed as a potential danger, and you know very well its consequence."

"The king... will come as well?"

"No, he should be here already," thought Good, as he noticed the shed on the other side of the clearing had been surrounded by soldiers from the First Army and the police. Apparently, only the

presence of the King of Graycastle would require such seamless security.

It seemed that the king did highly regard the Aerial Knights.

Good started to look forward to the unfolding of the event.

For a second, he put Eagle Face's meaningful sneer out of his mind.

...

In the hangar, there was completely a different scene.

The first glider, the "Seagull" was ready for her virgin trip.

This was also the very first manned glider after Tilly learned how to operate the testing gilder. Compared to the testing glider, this one was larger with wider and thicker wings. The frame of the glider was covered with skins. It was equipped with various supplementary facilities such as portholes, chairs, an airtight door that could be opened from the back, etc. In short, the "Seagull" was a real plane.

The traditional gliders in modern society were used as a supplementary transportation tool to cargo aircrafts. They were made of low-quality materials such as wooden frames and holey canvas. However, the "Seagull" was the exact opposite of her shabby predecessors. It was made of aaluminumalloys and steels with high tensile strength. Most of her major parts were integrally molded, with minimal bolts and welding. As for the non-structural parts, there were numerous small holes in it to minimize the weight of the aircraft. The magic coating ensured no gas would leak upon a huge air pressure difference. The bottom of the aircraft was armored for force landing purposes. As long as the plane maintained its stability, the armor would protect the crew and passengers from injuries even if the plane crashed.

The glider would be used to carry witches.

As the "Seagull" would be the only plane in Neverwinter, Roland

had to make sure it was absolutely safe.

"Well then... I'm boarding." Anna pressed a gentle kiss to Roland's cheek. "See you tomorrow."

"Stay safe. Don't force yourself," Roland reminded her. "If you encounter the demons, remember to protect yourself."

Anna smiled. "I know. You've said the same thing to me over and over again."

"Please don't worry. I'll protect her," said Phyllis, the God's Punishment Witch, solemnly.

Roland let Anna go reluctantly. After quite a while, he disengaged Anna and nodded slowly. "Off you go. I'll wait for you right here."

The First Army had actually built an airport at the edge of the forest, where the railways took a turn. Since there was no transportation tool that could complete a trip of over 500 miles within one day except Maggie, Roland had to invent a glider as an alternative.

The "Seagull" could carry 20 people at most. So, other than the pilots Tilly and Wendy, it could take 18 additional passengers in total, or cargo of 1,000 kilograms (when the chairs were removed). The speed of the glider depended on Wendy's magic power. Even if it flew at a "low" speed of 200 miles an hour, it could at least complete two round trips between Neverwinter and the front within a day, which was the fastest they could achieve at present.

Chapter 1071: The Glider (II)

After everyone got on the plane, Tilly walked toward Roland and asked, "What's wrong? Are you still worried?"

"You could tell?" replied Roland.

"A day hasn't even passed, yet everything you've said sounds like a farewell. Of course, I could tell." She shrugged and said, "Are you doubting my technology, or are you doubting Anna's ability?"

Regarding this difficult question, Roland could only smile bitterly.

The structure of The Seagull was extremely simple. Except for a few operating levers and corresponding movable control surfaces, it was basically a human vessel. It was essentially less complicated than the test model. With Anna's processing skills, it would be difficult to make mistakes.

After it was built, it had gone through several test flights and had even gone through an emergency landing simulation. The results were quite satisfactory—Other than Tilly's extremely powerful controlling ability, Wendy had also made great progress after explorations. She could now generate airflow in the right position to keep the aircraft stable at all times.

In order to ensure the safety of this voyage and that everything would be absolutely foolproof, Shavi and Molly were included among the passengers.

But even so, he still felt nervous.

It was worrying enough that half of the witches of Neverwinter were concentrated on a brand new aircraft, but on top of that they were going to travel alone to the Wild located 500 kilometers away. If it was not due to the fact that he had many tasks to do in Neverwinter, he would have wanted to come onboard The Seagull as well.

After he gently let his breath out, he looked at Tilly. "I don't think it's got anything to do with doubting your abilities. I just care too much about it. I hope that you'll all be able to live in a new era after the Battle of Divine Will ends."

After the two of them stared at each other for a moment, Tilly turned her head away. "You know, I was just making a joke... If I were in your shoes, I would be uneasy too."

Before Roland could react, she already went on top of the ramp.

"In that case, I'm off, Brother."

...

After the cabin door closed, a guard came and said, "Your Majesty, everything's been prepared outside."

Roland took a deep breath and replied, "Let's start."

"Yes!"

After the order was given, a series of programs started to run in an orderly manner.

"The stopper's open!"

"The road's empty!"

"All personnel leave the runway!"

"Open the hangar door!"

When the hangar's door slowly slid to both sides, the dazzling sunlight shone into the room and a path of light was reflected on the ground.

The guides raised their green flags higher.

"The Seagull can take off!"

At the same time, the steam whistle sounded throughout the airport—

Roland felt the wind start to pick up.

It was a wonderful feeling—He was standing in a place that was supposed to be absolutely windless, but he still felt the slight airflow over his cheeks.

It was, in fact, unfair to think of The Seagull as just a glider, when compared with its fellow machines as the latter was trying to obtain something that it had possessed from the very beginning.

The airflow violated the common sense of airflow movement, and it accurately appeared on the side of the airfoil—the breeze pushed the upward aileron like an invisible hand. This power may have seemed insignificant, but Roland knew it was the result of Wendy's deliberate control. The gentle wind released was within the range of the left and right wings, but it was a strong wind that could hinder people's mobility.

In other words, the direction and speed of the wind in the areas affected by Wendy's ability were completely under her control.

This also meant that The Seagull did not need to rely on its wings to maintain flight. It could also carry out actions that would be impossible for other gliders, such as the near-vertical short-ranged take-off and landing—The speed was only needed to achieve a greater lifting power. If it could get lifted directly, speed would no longer be an indispensable thing.

Of course, flying away in such a frivolous manner might be an eye-catching feat that could subvert the opinions of the experts. However, in the eyes of the laymen, it was lacking propriety.

What could be more shocking than seeing a few tons of machinery, yelling at the top of its head, and then slowly climbing until it vanished into the clouds?

When he remembered Tilly's excited expression as she spoke of this idea, Roland could not resist shaking his head in amusement.

It seemed she has now treated The Seagull as her big toy, and could not wait to show it off to the others.

...

"Woo—Woo—"

While the steam whistle sounded, Good also noticed a strange vision at the end of the Blackstone road—The soldiers quickly dispersed and the iron gate of the shed opened. A strange gray "giant bird" slipped out slowly. After doing a half-turn, it went onto the road where they were.

"Hey, did you see that? What's that?" It was evident that he was not the only one who had discovered the giant.

"A train? It doesn't look like it... There are no railway tracks on the ground."

"Could it be a new invention by His Majesty?"

"Was this the invention mentioned by Lord Eagle Face?"

"It seems to be coming towards us."

"Hang on a second, I seem to have seen this before!" Good pondered for a moment, and a light flashed across his mind. "Didn't Her Highness Tilly's collection of books have such a cover on one of them? It seemed like a bird with a pair of long identical wings... It does look like a bird, yet also not like one."

On second thought, he felt that the two were not completely alike. The shape and the number of the wings were different. Also, on that cover, he could at least see the rider, and he could perceive the reason why the machine seemed to be floating in the air—A machine that was not much bigger than a human and could support large wings, would be interpreted as an enlarged kite. Although the King and the Princess would certainly not have seen something that simple, theoretically it would still have made sense to them.

This object in front of them seemed to be an unclassified object.

When compared with the surrounding soldiers, its head was

clearly far above them. Other than the wings, its body was completely round and the whole body was wrapped tightly. The slender belly seemed as if it could hold a lot of things. According to its body type, it would be very difficult for it to fly. Even climbing on the ground seemed to be very difficult—

The very next instant, however, Good found out how ridiculous his ideas were.

The machine began to speed up.

And it soon exceeded the speed of horses running and showed no signs of stopping at all.

In the beginning, the platoon members were still heavily discussing and speculating. Now they suddenly quietened down.

Everyone heard the loud roaring from near and far.

"Oh my God..." Finkin gulped. "It's going to hit us."

This was also how most of the trainees felt at that moment.

Rationally speaking, as long as you stood still, you would not be hit. Though there was no reason to be afraid, everyone's bodies seemed to be shaking uncontrollably.

Not everyone could face a giant that could turn them into mincemeat with a step, and still be emotionless.

Yet this was exactly that type of giant beast—

They were not even as tall as its wheels!

As it got closer and closer, the whistling wind was almost hissing, and a slight tremor could be felt from the ground. According to legend, when the cavaliers were charging, just the horses' hooves alone could scare the enemy. As compared to a monster tall like a mountain, Good discovered that the cavaliers were not that scary.

He suddenly remembered Eagle Face's cold unfathomable laugh.

"Had the examiner... already experienced this?"

A gust of strong wind passed him before he could even think about it anymore!

In this short period of time, it seemed to have run hundreds of meters and went past the two rows of people on its sides.

Under the pressure of the airflow, Good was unable to control his feet, and his knees fell softly to the ground—Perhaps he had subconsciously decided to dodge before the gusts of wind arrived.

Although he could not get up, he still turned to look backwards.

What he saw next left him stunned!

He saw the beast raise its head, with both its feet off the ground, before slamming into the air and flying toward the blue sky. The sun was reflected on its wings and formed circles of colorful spots.

"Is this... an Aerial Knight?"

Good could not resist clenching his fists.

He really wanted to control such a monster—even if he had to sacrifice everything!

Chapter 1072: Underground Breeding Farm

Only when The Seagull had completely disappeared into the sky, did Roland look away.

"Sometimes I think that we should just build a command post," he whispered, "build it in a place where everyone can see so that it would not only boost morale, but it would also be a part of the Battle of Divine Will. Later on, when historians need to note it down, it would be something to brag about."

"Why would you be concerned about that?" There was a faint reply coming from the emptiness. "If you want to be recorded in history, you will need to endure Wendy's and Scroll's chatter until you make the first move to admit defeat and change your mind—I've experienced it. However, it's definitely not what ordinary people can tolerate. I think it's better if you give them less trouble."

Roland could not resist saying, "Yes, I guess you're right."

The battle with the demons would most likely last for months, even years. He would have to work hard to adapt to this new normality.

While he was thinking about this, he looked at the guard who was standing in the distance. "Call everyone, I'll go to the Third Border City."

The latter immediately bowed and replied, "Yes, Your Majesty! I'll tell the guards right away!"

According to Kyle Sichi's report, new progress has been made in the study of the rubber worms.

It was time to examine the results.

"Let's go," he nodded his head sideways and walked towards the airport exit.

...

After confirming that the secretion of rubber worms was valuable, the Taqila witches not only opened up a series of new caves for them, but they also served as keepers during their leisure time.

After all, it was not easy to find common people who could calmly face devouring worms and work in the wormholes. Long-term work underground made it more likely to develop psychological instability. The breeding part had now been fully taken over by Taquila. The workers were only responsible for the shipment and the processing of rubber.

This could be interpreted as another error in Roland's prediction. He had underestimated people's tolerance level in a claustrophobic environment.

Rubber worms detested the sunlight and liked damp and moist areas. They would also make noises when moving. Even if they were not attacking, the constant moving swishing noises would be enough to cause a mental breakdown for the people around.

He could not provide every worker with lighting and communication equipment, formulate detailed shift regulations, or get a psychological comforting guide—it was not that he was unable to do it, it was more of the fact that the price-performance ratio was too low. A large number of factories outside could find and fill their manpower needs easily. There would be no need to spend it on the processes that required witchcraft. Therefore, he simply transferred ordinary people to work on a more relaxed follow-up process.

The Chicken-and-duck Knight Prius Dessau was not idle. He spent his free time on the preparation of breeding manuals and guiding the production. The reason why the related products of Neverwinter could emerge numerously was certainly due to his credit.

The expansion of the breeding structure created more samples

for the testing of the rubber liquid. It was due to this groundwork research, that Roland could allow the entry of the Ministry of Chemical Industry, and prepare for the next steps of the plan.

After going underground, Pasha came forward. "Welcome, Your Majesty. Your people are currently in the rubber worm laboratory. Should I inform them that you've arrived?"

"That's not necessary. You can just take me there," Roland said laughingly, "by the way, I heard that Celine built a new breeding plant, which was even bigger than the previous ones?"

"Yes, it's just across from the lab." Pasha moved her main tentacles. "Not only did it apply the latest research from the Quest Society, it also drew on ideas from Dream World—would you like to take a look?"

"Oh?" He said excitedly, "Of course."

"In that case, please follow me."

Passing through a long aisle, Pasha then led Roland to a big hole.

There was an iron fence at the entrance, apparently used to prevent insects from escaping. From a small door at the edge of the cave, he could not help but be stunned by what he saw—the environment in the cave was designed in accordance with the ruin of the snow mountain. There were luminous plants, water systems, and giant mushrooms that were readily available. The three were clearly created after reasonable adjustments. The plants grew along the edge of the stone wall and the water fountain, thus becoming a new streetlight. As they were the insect's staple food, the mushroom was obviously the most abundant species. The huge mushroom umbrella almost covered the entire ground. Numerous insects were flying around and under the dim fluorescence light, only clusters of white bodies could be seen. They ate the mushrooms heartily and the dense buzzing sound made Roland think of the silkworms that he raised as a child.

What stunned him the most, however, was the size of the cave.

Judging from fact that he could not see the end of the light-emitting plants, this place seemed bigger than the main residence of the Third Border City—He assumed that the new farm was just a combination of several old caves, but now it seemed to be the contrary. The organized blue spots and the well-shaped water system gave him the feeling of a large factory.

"This is exactly on the edge of the Impassable Mountain Range, which is about the same height as the surface of Neverwinter." Pasha volunteered by saying, "If you open a hole from the south side, it's only one kilometer away from the Kingdom Main Street."

This meant that there was only one wall dividing the new breeding farm and Neverwinter. If he remembered correctly, by estimating the distance passed just now, it would be no more than two kilometers away from the main city area. The outside of the rock wall should be the temporary residential area for the migrants.

Roland asked rhetorically, "In order to transport the liquid secretions?"

"Exactly." Pasha raised her main tentacles. "Your Majesty, please look at the southern end."

He glanced at where she was pointing—He only saw a deep trench under the wall, like an escape route deliberately made for rubber worms.

"What's that?"

"Extracting area," Pasha explained. "Celine used the vocalization of insects to create an aisle that would get more and more narrow on the wall. As long as a specific buzz was let out on one end, they would crawl into the aisle, toward the source of the sound—but due to limitations on the width of the aisle, they could only explore halfway and their bodies would be stuck in the aisle with their

heads above."

"And then?" Nightingale, who had been listening on the side, could not help but ask.

"Then we will start the magic core at the end of the aisle." Pasha went on to say, "It's been adjusted to the razor blade mode. This cyclone is generally used to defend against the enemies of the narrow aisle. The core emits a magic light and fills up the aisle, shredding any obstacles that are in front of the light. The horizontal aisle is the path through which the magic light passes."

"The bugs will be split in two, and the mucus in the belly will gather together with the drainage trough in the lateral groove. In this way, you don't need to kill them one by one, and you can get a lot of mucus at once." She paused and said, "The one-kilometer distance is reserved for the collectors. According to Celine's idea, ordinary workers can enter the receiving area from the outside of the extracting area, but other than the trenches and the pools where the mucus flows, nothing can be seen. This is an easy way to collect and also less likely to cause panic."

"..."

Roland was silent for a moment.

He had nothing else to add.

This program could be said to be extremely mature under the existing technology. It took into account the entire process from breeding to harvest. If you built a rubber plant outside the mountains, then it would include even the production and processing. In particular, this type of modern-style, streamlined slaughter line was a concept that had been learned from Dream World.

Would using the precious magic core and Celine's lifetime research as a butcher's knife be considered as too mediocre a task?

Even if you could not find the Chosen One and activate the

Instrument of Divine Retribution, you did not have to be so self-punishing.

Suddenly, Roland thought of a problem.

"How many rubber worms can this breeding farm accommodate?"

"It's expected to be around 100,000. However, given their speed of reproduction, it will take about a year to fill this new farm."

"What about the dead bodies after the secretion's extracted?" he asked. "How are you planning to get it out?"

This was not a small problem. Roland once saw in a documentary that a modern chicken farm had hundreds of tons of chicken manure every day. If it was handled carelessly, it could result in serious soil and water pollution. Once the production was scaled up, any small detail could cause immense trouble.

It was still possible for the God's Punishment Witches to transport the bodies. Once the worms multiplied to more than 10,000, it would be easy to kill them, but difficult to clean up. If the bodies were not disposed of in time, the accumulation in the hole would definitely have a disastrous effect.

"Don't worry, Your Majesty." Pasha chuckled. "Fran and the rest of the witches are not reluctant about coming. In fact, it's amazing how much the three worm carriers can exhaust when digging fully."

"Coo—" After she understood this sentence, Nightingale let out a stomach gurgling noise.

Uh... okay.

Now Roland finally understood why the entrance had a small gate, but still needed a large fence to be installed.

That was just reserved for the three witches' entry into the aisle for dining.

Chapter 1073: Gelled Fuel

After leaving the rubber worm farm, Roland came to the lab.

He felt as if he had come into a wizard's lab. In this 30-square-meter room, many places were smeared with milky white solidified rubber liquid. Along the wall, stood a row of buckets filled with fresh worm liquid. Some rubber blocks seemed to have got burnt in a big pot, emitting a strong pungent smell. Like a wizard, Kyle also used long-handled spoons and stirring sticks in this lab.

Seeing that, Roland could not help thinking, "If there're some toads and bats in this lab, it'll look exactly like a wizard's lab."

"Your Majesty," Kyle Sichi simply nodded to greet Roland. "I think I've found what you wanted."

The alchemist looked very pale, and one of his fingers was wrapped in gauze. Seeing that, Roland became a little worried and asked, "Are you injured?"

"Don't worry. It's just a minor injury," Kyle waved his hand and said. He picked up a cup filled with light red rubber liquid and continued, "Your Majesty, look."

The next moment, he turned the cup upside down, but the liquid did not spill out at all. Instead, it just slowly slid down and then formed a soft hemisphere clinging to the rim of the cup.

Roland was intrigued. He stretched out his hand, wanting to touch the jelly-like substance, but the Chief Alchemist immediately stopped him.

"No, Your Majesty!" He took back the cup and explained, "This gel is corrosive."

"I remember that the worms' rubber liquid is non-toxic and harmless," Roland said with one eyebrow cocked. He had already used the liquid to manufacture food bags and straws.

"But it changed after mixing with blood."

"Blood?" Roland was startled and looked at Kyle's wounded finger again. "Did you hurt yourself for experiments..."

"Of course not, it was just an accident," Kyle said smilingly while stroking his beard. "Yeah, I'm crazy for chemistry, but I can't as yet go so far as to deliberately hurt myself for an experiment. There're lots of things waiting for me to explore in the chemistry world. I need to take good care of myself."

After that, Kyle explained to Roland how he had found this gel.

Something secreted by the rubber worms' glands could make their mucus become sticky. That was how the worms produced the rubber liquid. Due to the difference in the proportion of the secretion in the liquid, it could solidify into biological rubber blocks with different hardness. Once it solidified, it could not be melted back into liquid.

Given that, the Chief Alchemist had used lots of materials and had done lots of experiments, trying to find a way to solidify the rubber liquid into a gel. In the beginning, he tried to add various types of elementary substances, pure acids and alkali liquids to the rubber liquid, but none of these mixtures could achieve the desired effect.

Afterwards, he had tried many inorganic salts and even organic matters, and had discovered quite a few interesting gels during this process. However, none of them were what the king wanted.

Things had begun to change when an accident had happened to Kyle.

One day, when he had been cutting a rubber strip, he had inadvertently cut his own finger. His blood happened to drop into a cup of rubber liquid and reacted violently with the liquid. Instantly, a large amount of white smoke rose from the cup and the Bird Beak Mushroom in the liquid quickly melted into yellow

water.

In the end, the liquid in the cup had somehow turned into a light red gel.

"This gel's biggest feature is that it can keep the chemical structure of the things added to it," Kyle said and then threw the light red gel into the furnace. Suddenly, the fire burnt much more violently. The flames roared high into the air, and the gel was swiftly burnt into ashes. "I only added a spoonful of oil to it. Burning the gel alone can't achieve this effect. I can say that it's even better than the gel you asked for!"

The alchemist looked tired, but he sounded excited. Seeing the reflection of the raging fire in his eyes, Roland somehow felt his bursting feelings and guessed that he must have been thinking about how powerful this thing would be in the forthcoming war.

Roland needed this jelly-like substance to make napalm bombs.

In his previous world, napalm usually referred to a mixture of a gelling agent and either petrol or a similar liquid fuel. Compared to inflammable liquid fuel, which had a low flash point and high volatility, gelled fuel was more convenient and safer to use. Meanwhile, they could also be very destructive. A napalm bomb was able to set a large area on fire. No one within this burning area could get rid of the thick, sticky fuel quickly, and at the same time, they would be suffocated, as the burning would consume a great amount of oxygen.

Since the moment he had heard about the worms' rubber liquid, he had been thinking about using it to develop a gelling agent, which could be used to make napalm bombs.

He planned to use these bombs to destroy demons' outposts, which had given the Union lots of headaches in the past.

Back in the Taquila age, the Union's Blessed Army had not been able to move freely around an outpost without being protected by

witches who had been able to block off or clean out the Red Mist. Given that, the army consisting of the common people had been responsible for demolishing the demons' mist storage towers. Every time the Union had launched an attack on an outpost, the Blessed Army would have suffered a heavy loss, and all the common soldiers would have been killed in the battle.

The Union could not have afforded to launch lots of such attacks which would have quickly consumed its strength and resources. Once they had been surrounded by lots of outposts, they would have abandoned their land and run for their lives.

With napalm bombs, the demons' outpost would no longer be a major threat to the city. The fire could not only destroy their facilities but also dispel their Red Mist.

Hearing that rubber worms could provide raw materials for making napalm bombs, which could easily burn down a demons' outpost and clean out the Red Mist around it, Pasha had immediately agreed to raise these worms in the Third Border City. Alethea, who had complained a lot about these strange worms in the beginning, showed great enthusiasm in them after knowing their use.

In fact, Roland already had enough weapons for long range attacks by now. Even without napalm bombs, he could also let his army shoot down all the moving things in an outpost with those firearms before sending them there. However, he still hoped that the alchemists could successfully produce some napalm bombs. If they did, he would not have to prepare that much gunpowder for the battle, which could significantly reduce the burden on the chemical plants.

He was really delighted to see the light red gel, but he still had some concerns about it.

"Does it have to be a human being's blood?"

"No, Your Majesty," replied the alchemist. "Please rest assured.

An animal's blood also works. I've tested it. The only requisite for the blood is that it has to be fresh."

Roland felt much relieved hearing that, but soon he thought of another question. "Why does it have to be blood?"

"Well..." Kyle was speechless.

"I think the reason lies in the worms' origin," said Pasha. "The Multi-Eyed Monster used them to capture and store its preys. Blood may be one of the triggering conditions causing them to react. Although they were left behind by the monster, their instinct still exists."

"That's a reasonable explanation," Roland thought. "The monster apparently didn't store its preys as food. It's more likely that it was collecting information about the other species. Given that, it's possible that it would let the worms store them as jelly."

'No matter what, let's start to develop the new weapon as soon as possible," said Roland. "Now that we have the ideal gelling agent, the remaining work will be easy. You can let the alchemists from the old king's city take care of it. After all, you need to take a good rest now for your future exploration into the chemistry world."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Kyle said with a hand on his chest.

"I've an idea," Pasha said suddenly.

"Oh, what's it?" Roland looked at her and asked.

"We can bring a special guest to the weapon test," she replied while swaying her main tentacle cheerfully.

Roland immediately realized who she was talking about and asked. "Is that demon still alive?"

They had transferred Kabradhabi's soul into a crippled body to confuse its mind and had taken the chance to interrogate it and get much useful information. Unfortunately, since it had gotten used to the human body, it had remained silent. Apparently, it would

not give them any more information. Roland had left it to the Taquila witches, thinking that it would either kill itself or get tortured to death by the vengeful witches. Surprisingly, it was still alive.

"Yes, it's alive and well. It eats up all the food we bring to him every day." Pasha said.

It seems that it doesn't want to die at all.

It refuses to surrender or confess.

It's confidently waiting for the complete failure of humanity, believing that it'll be free sooner or later.

It's so ambitious and determined.

Is it because it thinks being killed by some bugs is a huge humiliation?

Roland thought and smirked mockingly. "That's a good idea. Let's take it to the weapon test."

Chapter 1074: An Unexpected Letter

In the inner city area of the old king's city, Kajen Fels was reading a script at his study inside his theatre.

After a while, the silence was broken by a round of warm applause from outside his study, which meant that a wonderful play had come to an end.

At this moment, he also finished reading the script.

He took off his glasses and rubbed his sore eyes, then he closed the script and placed it back on the shelf beside his desk.

The title of the story on the script's cover page is "The Wolf Princess".

This movie script was placed together with many other scripts from Neverwinter, including those such as "The Witches' Story", "New City" and "Dawn". May had given them to him as a farewell present, which his students had regarded as making a mockery out of him. Surprisingly, Kajen Fels, a well-known playwright, had accepted all of the scripts and brought them back to his own theater. He placed them in the most convenient position on his bookshelf, and by now he had already read each of them several times.

In his view, all these scripts lacked an engaging plot as well as a vivid story-telling style. He reckoned that the writer must have been a beginner who was only able to write the story in a straightforward manner. However, he still kept reading these stories since he had nothing else to do at the moment.

He found himself unable to write a stage play anymore.

Whenever he picked up his quill, he would think of the scenes that he had seen in the magical movie.

Those images would somehow sneak into his mind and occupy his thoughts, making it difficult for him to envision a stage

performance.

Someone who had tasted honey could hardly be satisfied with the sweetness of dew. That was how he felt now. Watching the magical movie was a really eye-opening experience for him. Unlike stage plays, the magical movie could show much more realistic scenes and can even present close-up images of the characters to its audiences. Such a mind-blowing experience had inspired him and given him many new ideas, but unfortunately, he had not acquired a chance to take part in a magical movie production.

But this discouraging fact did not stop him from thinking about the new techniques he had spotted in the magical movie.

Whenever he had an idea for a story, he would begin to wonder on how he was going to present it in a magical movie. He wanted to use close-up images of the characters' smiling faces to show audiences how they felt when they met each other for the first time. For their separation, he wanted to show a bleak background that gradually widened. Such ideas kept coming to him continuously.

But none of these ideas were suitable for a stage play.

He became stuck and felt depressed.

Only by reading the scripts from Neverwinter could he temporarily forget about his troubles.

However, he was clear that reading them could not solve his problems.

But he had no choice at the moment. May had refused to disclose more details about the magical movie. The Administrative Office had not responded to his request. It seemed that Neverwinter had completely shut him out. Until he could find a different way to learn more about the magical movie, he knew that he would continue to suffer.

At this moment, his maid knocked on the door and said, "Mr.

Fels, here are some letters for you."

While closing his eyes, he leaned back into his chair and said, "Put it outside, I'll check them later."

Every time after a play, his students, such as Roentgen and Egrepo, would come to his study to discuss their performance with him and ask for his advice. He intended to take some rest before they arrived.

"But... there's a letter with Graycastle's royal seal on the envelope. You told me that if it's a letter from Neverwinter, I should give it to you imme—"

Before the maid finished her sentence, Kajen suddenly opened the door.

"Where is it?"

The maid was startled and hurriedly handed a stack of letters to him. He quickly picked out the letter from Neverwinter and threw all the other letters back to the maid.

The next moment, he slammed the door upon the stunned maid and swiftly returned to his desk.

He opened the wax-sealed envelope and examined the letter.

To his great surprise, it was from the king!

Does the king finally know that we went to Neverwinter and wanted to perform a play for his coronation ceremony?

If I can directly contact the king, will I have a chance to know more about the magical movie?

Thrilled by the thought, he excitedly read the letter.

...

"How many roses did you receive today?" Egrepo asked Roentgen as they walked together towards Kajen's study.

"About a dozen, I didn't count them," Roentgen replied as she

shrugged. " I've received much fewer roses than before, but that's alright. I don't care."

"Aha, if your admirers heard these words, their hearts would break," Egrepo laughed and said. "It's inevitable. We have smaller audiences for the plays ever since the king had sent over half of the nobles to the mines and made Neverwinter the new king's city. But as long as this city still stands, things will gradually improve."

"We're lucky enough to receive flowers in the current situation," Bernis muttered. "There were six toupes in the city, but now three of them have already become bankrupt. I hope that we won't be the next one."

"Alas, that war changed everything..." Roentgen sighed.

"Ahem, ladies, we also need to see the benefits." Egrepo cleared his throat and continued, "We've expanded rapidly after taking in the former members of the three disbanded troupes. We can survive regardless of who is the king. Come on, hold your chin up. Don't look so frustrated because Mr. Fels is waiting for us."

Thinking about the drama master, everyone simultaneously nodded their heads and cheered up. After Kajen Troupe's bitter return from Neverwinter, they all worked hard to improve themselves in trying to win honor for their teacher, Mr. Fels. They all hated May because she had refused to tell Mr. Fels how the magical movie was made and had even said that it was confidential.

"Mr. Fels."

Egrepo opened the door of the study and then stood agape.

He found that Mr. Fels did not look normal.

He had expected that his teacher to be waiting for them comfortably in his chair as usual, but now he saw him listlessly standing by his desk.

"Mr. Fels, is there something wrong?" Bernis asked with concern.

"I have received a letter from Neverwinter. It's from the king." Kajen picked up the letter on the desk and said to them. "Here, take a look."

"Is it... okay?"

"That's alright. Read it."

Hearing that, Egrepo took the letter.

The people around him all leaned over to read it.

Seeing the excited look on their faces, Kajen discreetly sighed. He knew that they must have taken it as a letter of apology like what he had thought in the beginning. Just as he expected, his students were delighted to see the letter from the king and believed that the king must have already discovered and punished the person who had prevented Kajen Troupe from performing a play for the coronation ceremony.

However, the content of the letter was entirely beyond their expectations.

The king was forthcoming in answering questions about the magical movie. In the letter, he explicitly explained that it was made by a special instrument which was capable of recording images. His Majesty also said that he could not provide this instrument for another troupe since it was extremely rare. According to the letter, this instrument could only be made and operated by witches and was made of some rare materials from an ancient relic.

"At present, we need to mobilize all the resources in all the regions of Graycastle for the imminent battle. Given the unique viewing experience and the great disseminating effect of magical movies, both of which I think you've already witnessed in 'the Wolf Princess', I've decided to let these movies play an important part in spreading information and awareness for the war effort. It's regrettable that at present, I can't afford to use the instrument to

shoot other movies that are not directly related to national policies."

"But please rest assured as this situation is only temporary. After the war, when Graycasle returns to peacetime, magical movies will gradually become a popular art form and everyone will be able to shoot such a movie one day. When the time comes, I believe you and your troupe will produce an outstanding movie."

Kajen could accept this explanation about the magical movie.

But he still felt heart-broken after reading the letter.

This was because he knew from the letter that it was the king himself who had turned down Kajen Troupe's offer to perform a play for the coronation ceremony.

He felt hurt.

It turned out that from the very beginning it had only been his own wishful thinking to perform for the king.

Considering that such a well-prepared play had failed to garner favorable attention from the king, Kajen believed His Majesty was just being nice to compliment his troupe in the letter.

He felt regretful for being so full of himself and for unjustly blaming May.

Chapter 1075: A Young Heart

"..." After reading the letter, everyone fell into an awkward silence.

After a long time, Bernis mumbled bitterly, "I knew we shouldn't expect too much from him. Think about what everybody said about Prince Roland in the past and his favorite hangouts in the city. I thought he changed after he became the king, but..."

"Hush." Egrepo pulled her arm to stop her. "Be careful. All the nobles who can still come to the theatre are his supporters. Even if they are not, they will pretend to be loyal to him. If someone heard what you just said, you would have been in trouble."

"It seems that we can never make it to Neverwinter in this lifetime," Roentgen sighed and said.

"That's not a big deal. We're very popular here." Egrepo comforted her. "Kajen Troupe is still a first-rate troupe in all cities except Neverwinter. We can support ourselves."

"But magic movies will come here sooner or later," Kajen suddenly interjected. "Recently, I've been reading the scripts May gave me, and I found the stories had one thing in common. All of them are set in an imaginary world, an ideal world His Majesty wants to achieve. He intends to use these movies to spread his ideas and promote his national policies, so he won't just play them in Neverwinter. Can you still be so confident about stage plays when magic movies come here?"

Egrepo thought for a moment and suggested, "We... we can go to another country, such as the Kingdom of Dawn. Mr. Fels, the theaters there will be more than happy to accept us, if you ask—"

"No, I won't go to the Kingdom of Dawn," Kajen replied while shaking his head.

"How about we..."

Suddenly, Kajen looked up and said, "I want to go to Neverwinter again."

"What?"

"Mr. Fels, are you sure?"

Everyone was shocked.

"It'll take at least a month for the troupe to go there and back, and during this period of time, the troupe will have no money coming in." Egrepo said urgently. "We'll be alright, but the new actors and apprentices will be unable to make ends meet and will probably leave the troupe for this."

Kajen knew that it was hard to take the whole troupe to Neverwinter. Without a theater that was willing to take them in, they would have to prepare all the props and goods by themselves, which was not an easy task.

The next moment, Kajen said something, which was completely beyond everybody's expectations. "I'll go there by myself."

This time, his students remained speechless for an even longer time before they asked hesitantly, "What... are you going to do in Neverwinter?"

"Try to be a magic movie actor," Kajen said slowly. "His Majesty said that these movies are going to become a popular art form someday, but he didn't say how long it'll take to popularize this art form... 10 years or 20 years? I can't wait for such a long time. Even if it only takes five years, it'll be too late for us to learn the magic movie at that time, and by then Star Flower Troupe will be far ahead of us."

Kajen believed that the best time to catch up with a trend was at the beginning of it.

"But His Majesty has Star Flower Troupe already..." Benis murmured.

"Star Flower Troupe only has May and Irene," Kajen glanced at his students and said. "Any troupe has to practice repeatedly to present an outstanding performance. May's troupe can't cope with all the movies His Majesty wants to shoot, so Neverwinter may be willing to let us stay to reduce Star Flower Troupe's workload. And if we can outshine them in some type of drama, which they're not good at, such as a farce, we may have a chance to act in a magic movie."

"Are you willing to play a role in a... farce?" Egrepo could not believe what he had heard and asked.

"Life is about trade-offs. Most of the time, if you want to get something, you have to give up another thing for it," Kajen nodded and replied. "Even if we can only act in a farce, we should do our best."

He paused for a moment before adding, "Of course, His Majesty may turn us down again. When that happens, I'll join Star Flower Troupe. Do any of you want to come with me?"

No one answered.

Kajen guessed that they might just be too stunned to say anything at this moment or reluctant to leave the old king's city.

He understood their feelings.

They reacted just as he had expected. In fact, he himself also got shocked by this sudden idea. As Egrepo had said, as the most venerated playwright in the world of today, he could continue his career even in the Kingdom of Dawn. However, he decided to give up the theater for magic movies, which was not an easy choice at all.

Because of his age, he could not move quickly and easily on the stage, and his memory was not as good as before. If this drama master really worked as an actor, he would only be able to play a walk-on part. No matter how well he acted, it would inevitably

become a joke in the eyes of others.

Many years ago, as a famous actor, he had given up his acting job and begun to write plays. Since then, he had never thought about returning to the stage as an actor. However, now he had no choice. The king had turned down his troupe and he did not seem to appreciate his stories very much. Meanwhile, he was unable to write plays like "New City" and "Dawn". Given these, he thought he probably could only join Star Flower Troupe as an actor to take part in magic movie production.

This is incredible! His students still stood agape.

Kajen could see how shocked they were at a glance.

It was indeed an incredibly bold decision, but after making this decision, he finally felt relieved.

He was not young anymore, but at this moment, he felt young at heart. This feeling reminded him how happy and inspired he had been during his first visit to the theater.

Since then, 30 years had passed and he had never felt the same impulse until he saw the magic movie.

Nothing could stop him from pursuing his dream.

"Among you, Egrepo has worked with me for the longest time and he knows how to manage a troupe. When I'm away, he'll run the troupe on behalf of me," Kajen said calmly. "Many talented young people have joined our troupe recently. Give them more chances to make an appearance. As long as audiences come to our theater to watch plays, you'll be able to support yourselves."

"Mr. Fels..." the students still wanted to say something but were immediately stopped by Kajen.

He decided to listen to his heart.

He wanted to follow his dream.

He wanted to act in a magic movie.

...

Neverwinter had produced its first napalm bomb.

As Roland had expected, it did not take the alchemists a long time to make it.

Only a week after finding the ideal thickening agent, the Ministry of Chemicals successfully manufactured the first napalm bomb.

It consisted of a dozen identical iron cylinders, which were one meter high and 30 centimeters in diameter. Explosives were contained inside the cylinders, and the fuses of all the cylinders were connected together.

"Your Majesty, this is the bomb I designed. I call it Burning-city Thunder," Retnin said excitedly. "There're three different substances inside the cylinders. At the bottom, there's the snow powder layer. The combustion-supporting layer is in the middle, and the fuel layer is at the top. When the snow powder is ignited, the flames will go up and reach the combustion-supporting layer and then the jelled fuel. This process resembles that of a volcanic eruption, and..."

The former Chief Alchemist of the Alchemist Workshop of the old king's city thought he finally got a chance to replace Kyle Sichi and talked on and on. Apparently, he was very proud of his work, and many details in his design did impress Roland. Apart from the clear arrangement of the three layers inside the cylinders, he also used an electric detonator and adopted the delayed ignition technology to further boost the bomb's killing power. When this bomb was ignited, the cylinders would explode one by one and would not affect each other adversely. Roland had to admit Retnin was very talented.

He found Retnin was particularly interested in creating bombs and explosives.

He only doubted his ability to name his works.

But for Roland, it was not a big deal. After all, when this kind of weapon became operational, he was the only one who had the right to name it.

"Well then, let's test your Burning-city Thunder now," Roland said smilingly.

Chapter 1076: The Power of “Worms”

The test site was at a valley down the Impassable Mountain Range.

It was surrounded by mountains and never before imprinted by the foot of man. With no access to public transit, it was quite difficult for people to reach this area unless with the help of an airplane or a tunnel. Therefore, this was the best place to conduct some secret projects.

Napalm weapons were by no means something of extreme secrecy, but there were some rare spectators.

“Ah... the air here is so refreshing. I can smell flowers and fresh soil,” said Celine as she emerged from the crack of rocks while swaying her tentacle. “It has been over 200 years since I saw the blue sky last time.”

Retnin shuddered. He looked at Roland, panic-striken and lost.

Everyone would be horrified by the sight of a giant blob monster coming out of the ground. If this was a disaster movie, the appearance of such a monster was definitely a turning point of the story where background music normally kicked in.

Not to mention that the giant monster could actually speak.

If one could still maintain his composure upon such a sight, Roland would think he was a competent official.

This was also why Roland had selected this valley as his test site.

“Don’t worry. They used to be human too, but the demons turned them into monsters,” Roland comforted the alchemist as he patted him on the shoulder. “They communicate through their minds, and that’s why you heard their voices. If you want to talk to them, just say it aloud or within yourself, like this...”

Roland turned to Celine and said, “It isn’t hard for an original

carrier to take a look at the blue sky and clear water once in a while, is it?"

"That's because Celine locks herself up all day in the research room," said Pasha's voice as she emerged from the earth. "The God's Punishment Witches have been talking about their experience in the Dream World lately. There's a specific word that describes her lifestyle. I remember you call a person like her a... shut-in?"

"I somehow remember there are two adjectives before that." Alethea put in as she appeared with the Senior Demon.

"Do you really want me to say them?"

"Oh, not really..."

Roland raised his brows at Retnin and said, "See? They aren't that scary, are they?"

"Y-Yes, you are right..." Retnin agreed quite reluctantly.

"They sacrificed their human bodies in exchange for a life of eternity. Their new bodies are highly resistant to heat and corrosion, which means they can directly touch many chemicals. Their tentacles are sensitive to different materials, which enables them to conduct multiple experiments at the same time. In other words, their bodies are perfect for chemical research. What do you think? Are you interested in working with them?" Roland asked with a shrug.

Retnin swallowed hard. After a long silence, he answered, "I... I'm fine, Your Majesty."

Although Retnin declined Roland's offer, he no longer avoided eye contact with the Senior Witches from Taquila. Instead, there was a bite of curiosity in his look.

Roland shook his head in amusement and walked to the demon bound by ropes.

Although the demon had lost its legs, Roland did not want to take chance.

This body used to belong to a God's Punishment Warrior after all.

Roland crouched down, looked straight into the demon's eyes and said, "You are Carb... Radaby, right?"

Without connecting to a person, the demon could not understand the human language even though it was currently in a human vessel. However, the overt hatred and animosity in the demon's eyes seemed to have transcended the language barrier between them, so blatant that everyone knew what it was trying to convey.

Roland continued indifferently, "I prepared a firework display for you. You committed atrocities against the human population on the Land of Dawn and destroyed more than half of our kingdom. Now, it's time for us to retaliate. Enjoy the show."

He then nodded at Retnin and said, "Go ahead."

The alchemist cast a glance at the demon. Knowing that he was not supposed to question the king's order, he simply shouted, "Yes, Your Majesty!"

Everybody descended into the underground tunnel after everything was in order, leaving the demon alone on the cliff.

"Explosion countdown, ten, nine... one, fire!"

An operator ignited the bomb.

In an instant, red flames erupted from the center of the valley. Unlike the high explosives used in their maneuver, the firelight was dimmed by a cloud of thick, black smoke. Neither the noise nor the impact produced by the explosion was as impressive as that by the high explosives.

But they soon noticed a big difference between this new weapon and the old one.

Through a porthole, they could clearly see thick smog rise slowly

and spread across the sky, as though some giant hand had dropped a misty mantle. The hot air pushed fuels up into the air, which cascaded down to the ground like fiery lava and blasted like open umbrellas.

After these "umbrellas" opened up, flickers of red light grew brighter and soon turned into a flood of flames!

Roland knew this was a result of the reaction of the aluminum with the iron oxides in the combustion-supporting layer.

The energy released from this chemical reaction caused a second explosion that lasted for several seconds.

As the explosives rained down, the valley was immediately ablaze. Although Roland and his party were currently in a relatively safe area, they could still sense hot waves coming from the explosion.

Due to the pull of gravity, the thick smoke and the flames finally separated. The smoke dissipated while the fire spread throughout the entire test site. There had been a forest and a brook at the center of the valley, but they were now both aflame. Roland did not think it necessary to check whether their testing animals were still alive at this point anymore.

On the other side of the tunnel, Alethea curled up her main tentacle.

"If only there was a weapon like this in the Taquila Age!" thought she.

Since fire was the natural enemy of the Red Mist, the demons never left any visible combustible materials around their outpost. It was impossible to ignite firewood to disperse the Red Mist. Even if the witches managed to produce flame sources with a high temperature, they had to apply their magic power to make them work. Nevertheless, the new weapon offered them a possibility to instantly wipe out the demons' lair. If they could successfully

transport the weapon into the outpost, they would be able to cut a path for the army.

In that case, the God's Punishment Witches would also have a greater chance of survival as they no longer needed to protect common soldiers from the demons and the Red Mist.

Alethea almost foresaw a flaming mist storage tower gradually turn into a blinding pillar of fire.

The three Senior Witches exchanged their ideas quickly in their original carriers. Without a single word, they reached a mutual understanding among themselves.

Alethea stole a glance at the mortal man and heaved a sigh... It was a pity that he had not been born 400 years ago.

The flames finally subsided after four hours.

The whole valley was razed to the ground.

When Roland came out of the tunnel, he had an illusion that it was mid summer rather than early spring. The scorching air had turned the valley into a temporary greenhouse.

He looked at the demon on the cliff. As they had cleaned up the surroundings earlier, the fire had not reached their shelter. As for the God's Punishment Witches, they could not sense heat anyway, so the explosion caused them no harm by any means.

But Roland clearly spied a hint of disbelief in the demon's eyes.

This was probably what Pasha and the other God's Punishment Witches expected to see.

The Taquila witches did not think the demon would yield.

They just wanted it to know —

That the creatures they had been looking down upon all this time had now the capability to annihilate them

Chapter 1077: The Front on the Fertile Land

"These are the last steel rails you need to work on today," Leaf said as her head peeked out from the treetops. "Thank you."

"No problem!" Molly cheerfully replied. She patted her flat chest and blew a whistle, "Come out, my servant Momota!"

A blue ball instantly appeared in midair and gradually grew bigger until it reached the height of the treetops. It stretched out its two arms, scooped up the rails on the ground and gulped them down. However, the rails were too long so the two ends of the rails stuck out of the ball. It looked as if the blue ball was punctured by the rails.

"Momo...ta? But I remember that last time you called it Momoka."

"Really?" Molly said with her head lopsided. "That doesn't matter. What matters is that I pronounce her name out loud. Isn't that how you demonstrate your power?"

"Um..." Leaf pondered for a while and asked, "Did Mystery Moon tell you to do that?"

"How did you know?" Molly asked in surprise. "She also asked me to join the Detective Group."

After the release of the magical movie "The Wolf Princess", many viewers were impressed with the scene where Lorgar transformed into a wolf and bravely lunged at her enemy to save her sister. Further encouraged by the Detective Group, young witches in Neverwinter started to shout their slogans out loud whenever they applied their abilities, and this had gradually become a new trend. Molly was surprised that Leaf also knew about the latest trend in the city considering that she usually confined her activities within the Misty Forest. The last time she had seen her in Neverwinter was at the king's coronation ceremony.

"I... No, nothing," Leaf evaded the question with a cough. She turned in the direction of Neverwinter and said, "They have delivered new supplies. I've got to go."

Although Molly really wanted to know how Leaf kept herself up to date, she suppressed her curiosity and waved goodbye to her.

In the next second, Leaf transformed into a spirit and disappeared into the thick forest.

Molly learned that Leaf could cross the Misty Forest within a blink of an eye. Leaf practically knew everything about the forest. As Leaf drew magic power out of thousands of trees, she could manipulate plants and thus continuously supply construction materials to the front. Compared to her, Molly's Magic Servant worked much more slowly.

Now Molly had a vague understanding of the power of evolution.

Molly wondered when she would become as powerful as Leaf. She had been living in Neverwinter for four to five months and had learned the basics of reading and writing. She thought her ability might evolve after she finished reading "Principles of Nature".

Molly clambered up the Magic Servant and directed Momota to leave the forest.

As soon as she walked out of the forest, she saw a busy construction site.

"One, two, three, go!"

"A little to the left!"

"Take it easy, take it easy!"

Thousands of workers were busy repairing Tower Station No.0 which was located near the railway that stretched away to the northeast. The station was the first stop on the way to the Taquila ruins and also the terminus station of the route to the forest. A

blockhouse stood at each corner of the station. The four blockhouses were connected by trenches and parapets as one unit. The workers were wearing various clothes, some of them were even half-naked. It was hard to associate such a scene with the upcoming battle had Molly not known about the king's plan beforehand.

"Hey, isn't it Miss Molly? Thanks for coming to help us."

"We're going to bother you again today. The train unit is swamped."

"Miss Molly, we tipped over a steam engine. Could you make it stand upright?"

Many people stopped to greet Molly or asked for her help as she pushed through the crowd and slowly walked down the railway. She was remembered by many workers even though she had been here for only a week.

Although Molly's main task was to make sure nothing happened to the "Seagull", she was ready to help others, just like what she was used to be doing back on the Sleeping Island.

Molly felt really happy when her help was appreciated.

When she had been on the Sleeping Island, only the witches and a small number of people from the Fjords would show gratitude for her work. There had been little she could do other than loading and unloading ships back then. But now, she could help with many things here and was treated as a celebrity. Her heart was constantly filled with pride and happiness. As long as the "Seagull" remained on the ground, she was free to wander around the railway construction site.

The scenery beyond Tower Station No.0 was slightly different.

Wisps of smoke came into Molly's sight.

They billowed from trains.

In fact, these steel monsters were the main transportation tool. They supplied materials to the front nonstop, as if they would never become tired. Molly had transferred only a very small portion of the materials.

Unfortunately, according to Princess Tilly, it was not easy to build these trains. They needed the "Seagull" to facilitate the transportation between Neverwinter and the front because there was only two to three trains in the entirety of Neverwinter. Regardless of how the battle on the Fertile Plains would unfold, they had to make sure that the logistics and production at the rear were not interrupted.

As Molly approached the end of the railway, she saw more uniformed soldiers.

After a week of observation, Molly could now distinguish the new recruits from the veterans. Those who stole a glance at her every now and then during a class were usually newbies, whereas those who bowed their heads or were too focused on polishing their weapons to pay attention to her were normally seasoned soldiers.

"Look carefully. There are different types of demons!" said an instructor as he tapped a picture on the blackboard. "The most common type is the Mad Demon. They have large bodies, thick arms and are good at throwing bone spears. They don't throw spears in rapid succession unless it's of an utmost emergency."

"Hahaha..." The crowd erupted into laughter.

"Silence!" The instructor barked. "I hope they won't scare the hell out of you when you come across them. The only way to save your lives is to pull the trigger and finish them before they kill you. Neither fleeing nor yielding would work in this situation. Do you understand?"

"Yes!" the class shouted in unison.

"Now, next one," the instructor said as he pointed to another picture. "This one, with its eyes on its forehead, is called the Fearsome Demon. There are not many of them, but they're far more powerful than ordinary Mad Demons. They can paralyze your movements when they see you. You basically can't do anything except to wait for your death. However, you can protect yourself with a God's Stone of Retaliation. Everybody at the front will receive a God's Stone, although there is a chance that you may encounter them when you are not wearing a God's Stone."

"What should we do then?"

"Pray to your grandmother or picture someone or something you adore in your head. Use every possible means to overcome your fear!"

At these words, someone turned around and glanced at Molly.

Molly smiled back, winking at the soldier.

"Hey, where are you looking?" The instructor snarled at the soldier. "Get out of here and go back to the construction site if you don't want to be in my class!"

The man immediately ducked away.

Molly felt she preferred the new recruits over the veterans.

She twitched her lips and urged the Magic Servant to move forward.

After another few hundred meters, she reached the very end of the railway where some laborers, soldiers and witches were working together.

She immediately caught sight of a girl with flaxen hair in a work suit.

It was the Queen of Graycastle, Queen Anna Wimbledon.

Chapter 1078: Gunshots on the Plains

Whether it was her figure, fashion or appearance, Queen Anna was not the most outstanding one among the witches. To keep it out of the way while she was working, she tied her smooth hair into a ponytail. Her work clothes, which were designed by Roland, focused on functionality over style. The cuffs and collar were tightly bundled and it was stained with dust as she had stayed in the wild for long periods of time. If someone met her for the first time, they would not believe she was the Queen of Graycastle.

But Molly greatly admired her.

Because even if someone didn't know Anna was the queen, they would understand that she was an important person. She was surrounded by high officials in Neverwinter, for example, Karl Van Bate, the Minister of Construction; Edith Kant, the head of General Staff, etc.... The route of the railway, the speed of advancement, and the construction arrangements, all needed to be discussed with her. In other words, even if she were not a witch, she would still be the focus of everyone's attention.

Despite being completely ignorant of what they were discussing, Molly felt that Anna, who stood tall, surveying the land, holding maps, and discussing plans, was really gorgeous.

Especially when she focused on work, Anna's lake-blue eyes shined with light like unblemished gems.

When working with Anna, both recruits and veterans would defer to her.

Molly thought for a moment and ultimately decided not to interrupt Her Highness. Instead, she directed her Magic Servant to avoid the crowd and unloaded the rails in the storage area.

Just after she laid down the rails, Shavi peeped over a pile of bricks and asked, "Did you go over to the forest again?"

Molly immediately had a bad feeling.

She ran around the brick pile and found that the other witches were playing cards.

"Hey, if it isn't little Molly?" Andrea grinned.

Margie was also there, but looked very uncomfortable.

"How can you guys slack off and play cards here?" Molly yelled, "If you're discovered, what will people think of Sleeping Spell? I'm going to tell Lady Tilly!"

"I was... forced by them to come here," said Margie, lowering her head and wringing her hands.

"Who is slacking off?" Shavi retorted, "I unloaded all these bricks from the train. Otherwise, the workers would still be unloading them. I'm just resting after I finished my work. How can you say I'm slacking off?"

"You should know that tea time is as important as work. An elegant lady knows how to keep a balance between them," Andrea said, combing her blonde hair with her fingers. "Since Margie is here, she can make sure no one will find us. After all, it's definitely not allowed to cause trouble for Lady Tilly. Don't worry about it. By the way, do you want to join us? For playing cards, the more the merrier."

"Of course not—" Molly was interrupted by an alarm as she was preparing to argue with Andrea.

"Woo— Woo— Woo—!"

Three short blasts meant the discovery of hostile forces!

She quickly looked to the northeast, only to see nothing but half-melted snow and weeds across the vast plain.

"The enemy was discovered by either Sylvie or Lightning and they gave an advanced warning, so you won't see anything yet," Shavi reminded her.

"Oh, no—Her Highness!" Molly suddenly remembered that the Queen of Graycastle would be in harms way. She had heard more than once about Anna's unique significance to King Roland and Neverwinter. Therefore, she should do everything possible to guarantee her safety.

As Molly started to run back, Shavi caught her.

"Her Highness is naturally protected by the guards. You won't be of much help if you go back there," Shavi shook her head. "Based on the speed of the flying demons, Her Highness has at least 10 to 15 minutes to take shelter before the enemy arrives. According to our orders, if there is no prior arrangement for a combat plan, the first thing to do when confronted with an unexpected enemy is to protect yourself and then go to the nearest First Army, Taquila God's Punishment Witch or other combat groups."

"So you don't have to go anywhere. Stay here and protect me," Andrea had already climbed up on the top of the brick pile with her rifle. "Leave it to me."

Just as Shavi said, after Molly climbed onto the brick pile, she found the huge construction site was empty, as if the previous busy scene had never existed. She could faintly see heads in the trenches and some gun emplacements. The train shut down and a sense of seriousness pervaded the entire front.

"Sylvie, were you the one who spotted the demons?" Andrea took out a Sigil of Listening and asked, "How many are there?"

"... No, this warning was sent by Lightning." Sylvie's reply came from the Sigil after a while, "It seems that there are only four Devilbeasts with Mad Demons. The direction is on your right side. There is no trace of Senior Demons."

"Only four? It seems like this is just an accidental encounter."

"Probably, but don't take it too easy." Sylvie warned, "You should be able to see them in five minutes."

A few minutes later, the demons arrived as expected. The four dark spots were particularly striking under the bright sky. They undoubtedly saw the railway on the Fertile Plains. What was strange was that the demons did not attack, but instead hovered at a distance.

"What are they hesitating about?" Shavi frowned, "that's not the demon's style."

"Can you hit them?" Molly asked.

"No, they're too far away," Andrea shrugged. "Too many variable for the coin toss. Of course, there is another method—"

Molly automatically ignored the part which she could not understand and asked, "What method?"

"For example... a gun with a larger-caliber." She smiled and pointed to the side of the brick pile, "Can your Magic Servant do me a favor?"

Until then Molly hasn't noticed this gun of incredible size. Its barrel was over a meter long. She immediately realized what Andrea meant— she could not use such a heavy weapon alone.

"Have you... been taking this with you when you played cards?"

"Thanks to Margie," Andrea said, shrugging. "Besides, carrying a variety of weapons is just a basic requirement for a soldier."

Molly stopped talking and raised her hand to summon her Magic Servant. She grabbed the giant gun and placed it on top of its head. At the same time, she ordered Momota to lower its body and spread itself into an oval cushion.

"It's a pity that I hadn't brought you along for the last fight," Andrea laid down on Momota. "This gun base is much more comfortable than Ashes. Raise the head a little. Right, that's the right angle."

"How about now?" Molly adjusted the shape of the Servant.

"Perfect. By the way, can you shrink its arms? As small as your fingers."

"No problem... But then it won't be able to hold heavy objects."

"That's okay. Perfect." Andrea squeezed the shrunken arms of the Magic Servant into her ears and then held the gun handle. "Don't forget to cover your ears!"

Simultaneously, she pulled the trigger.

A loud bang exploded from the gun!

A few seconds later, a demon exploded into red mist in the air.

Chapter 1079: The Demons' Intentions

The other three demons responded immediately. They controlled the Devilbeasts and scattered in all directions. They then zigzagged in a direction where they came from and soon disappeared into the distance.

While retreating, a demon even turned back to toss its spear toward the head of the Devilbeast which had a broken wing and was spiraling down.

Although Andrea concentrated on the target, the second standing coin never appeared.

"They escaped?" Shavi asked in surprise, "What did they come for?"

For the first time, the demons escaped before a direct confrontation. In previous cases, the brutal demons would not give up until they attacked their targets severely. It was indeed surprising that they just hovered rather than attacking or spying.

"I don't know..." Andrea released the trigger, "They seem to have figured out how to dodge the sniper. The enemies learn very quickly, don't they, little Molly?" She laughed, looking at Molly who was rubbing her ears.

"You should remind me earlier next time," Molly complained. The sound of this weapon was not lower than that of a cannon. She hardly had time to cover her ears. Even so, she still felt dizzy due to the thunder-like bang.

"I'm sorry. I didn't expect the 'guiding lines' to appear so fast. Probably my ability has improved again." Andrea blinked her eyes, "I'll give you a special compensation to apologize."

"You didn't do it on purpose. You don't have to apologize," Molly scratched her head. "After all, defeating the enemy is more important."

"But I'll feel sorry for it."

"Well..." She had to agree in face of the earnest stare of Andrea,
"What's the compensation?"

"Chaos Drinks," Andrea said, covering her mouth.

"Are you... sure?" Molly asked in surprise. When they were on the Sleeping Island, she only knew that Andrea was born in a prominent family and was one of the most powerful combat witches, so she was nearly as important as Ashes. In addition, Andrea used to stay with Lady Tilly, so Molly had few opportunities to communicate with Andrea in the past. After coming to Neverwinter, the gap between combat witches and non-combat witches completely disappeared. It was then she found out that Andrea was not as cold as she imagined, but elegant and friendly.

However, she had not expected Andrea to be so generous!

"Yeah, the general rule is a cup for each round. My special compensation is that if you lose, you don't need to give me a cup. If I lose, I'll give it to you. How is this? It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"I see. If I don't have to lose, it's indeed... Wait, it's not!" Molly suddenly understood, "Doesn't it mean that I'm going to play cards? I won't join—"

"But you've promised it, just now," Andrea revealed a "too late" expression. "Stay here and don't leave. I'll go to the command post and come back soon!"

Before Molly had time to explain, Andrea had already jumped down from the brick pile and rushed to the end of the dump site.

She turned to Margie who obviously had the similar feeling and finally knew what she meant by saying "I was forced by them to come here".

...

Frontline command post.

Within half an hour, all the information about this "accidental encounter" had been gathered and placed on Iron Axe's desk.

Lightning and Maggie who had been wandering around the watch circle were the first ones to discover the enemy's trail.

At that time, they were flying through the clouds one after another and happened to have been out of the sight of the enemy. After that, they followed the demons at the six o'clock direction and sent warnings to Sylvie through the Sigil of Listening.

According to Lightning's description, the demons' flight route was a straight line on the map which linked the railway front and the Taquila ruins. In other words, they were not patrolling but they came after the First Army from the very beginning.

The entire encounter lasted for about a quarter of an hour. Miss Andrea was the only one to achieve the victory, as the anti-Devilbeast sniper rifle was the only effective weapon which could hit the target at this distance. After one demon was shot, the rest of them immediately chose to retreat and zigzagged to avoid Andrea's further shooting. It was proved to be effective and Andrea failed to shoot them again.

Sylvie monitored their process of leaving the watch circle.

Lightning and Maggie did not take any further action, either.

Fifteen minutes later, the alarm was lifted.

Iron Axe laid down his report and took a deep breath.

This was the integrated war intelligence system designed by His Majesty. Each unit would report their actions level by level. The General Staff department would then collect all information, sort out and refine it in order to review the whole combat process. With the assistance of a map and a sand table, the military commanders could have the most direct understanding of the front battle.

Though having operated the system several times before the expedition, Iron Axe was still shocked by the initial practical use of the system. For the first time, he felt that the war was so clear that it felt like he was standing on a cloud that overlooked the entire combat.

In Iron Sand City, even the battle of hundreds of people between the clans could be chaotic. If he wanted to sort out the result of the battle, he could only get a rough conclusion even if he devoted a lot of time and energy to it. Yet, it was different now. Both the enemy's action and First Army's response were clearly presented in his mind. The feeling of being on top of it made him realize that the battles between the Mojin clans were merely street fights.

Of course, it was far from being sufficient enough to know the overall situation. The most important task was to figure out the demons' intentions.

Iron Axe looked at Edith, who was carefully staring at the map. She was the only one not to discuss with other Staff members.

He had previously reported to King Roland his private contact with her, but Iron Axe had no regrets. He had pledged allegiance to the king. Even if he felt sorry for her, he would not make a second choice. Nevertheless, he felt guilty toward her and was prepared to be ridiculed or ignored by her. What she did was out of his expectation. She acted as if it had not happened, and still invited him to participate in the gatherings of the General Staff Department. However, she did not have any private discussions with him anymore.

He realized that he indeed did not understand this woman's thoughts—since they were in the Southernmost Region.

"Did you find something?" Iron Axe walked behind her.

"No," Edith shrugged. "I'm not a demon and I just met them once. How can I know what they think?"

"You didn't discuss with them. I thought you had some idea."

"Discussion without clues is meaningless. You can neither prove it nor deny it. It contributes nothing but anxiety."

"In that case, I'll take it as the final decision of the General Staff and report to His Majesty," Iron Axe nodded. If even Pearl of the Northern Region could not figure it out, there was no need for them to continue the discussion.

"Well, go," Edith paused, "but..."

"But what...?"

"I don't think it'll end so easily. If the enemy really came for us, they'd definitely take actions again in the near future."

What happened later proved Edith's guess.

Just two days later, the demons once again appeared in the northeast.

Four Mad Demons again.

They were farther away from the front this time. Only four black spots could be barely observed by the naked eye.

Chapter 1080: A New Station

"Miss Sylvie has confirmed that there are no other demons nearby."

"If the enemy launches an attack at this distance, we have at least five minutes to react."

"That's enough for the anti-aircraft machine gun squad to prepare. How about the threat judgment?"

"There is no Senior Demon among them. The threat to Her Highness is almost zero."

"If we continue the construction, the greatest loss may be from the rail removal team, as it's inconvenient to evacuate such a large number of workers in a short time. It's estimated to result in one or two casualties."

Everyone in the command post was busy analyzing the intelligence and discussing. Their conclusions were listed on the board. This was a habit gradually cultivated by the Staff members. In face of complicated and diverse information, written words left more of an impression than oral ones.

"In conclusion," Ferlin Eltek, with a hand on his chest, said to Iron Axe, "we think that it's better to keep construction than to stop and defend. The demons will probably know our intention, but His Majesty already expected this. As for the four flying demons, we only need to be on the basic alert."

In a word, the conclusion they got from all the information was "no threat".

The General Staff assisted in analyzing the information and giving advice while Iron Axe was the final decision-maker. He realized that he totally agreed with the conclusion.

The First Army was different from the ancient army 400 years ago. A vanguard unit of 5,000 soldiers was huge and would

definitely not be affected by four Mad Demons. Even if they killed the demons at the price of the injuries and deaths of several workers, it would not be accounted as a loss for His Majesty's plan.

After all, the risk of working in Barbarian Land had long since been written into the contract.

Iron Axe looked at Edith, who did not say anything.

At the command post, silence meant approval.

"I got it. Order the construction team to continue working and the anti-aircraft machine gun squad to be on alert. The rest stand by as usual," Edith suddenly said when Iron Axe was ready to give orders to the lieutenant.

Not to him, but to Agatha and Phyllis.

"Do you have a way to swat those flies directly?"

"Do you want us... to take the initiative to attack?" Agatha frowned.

"That's right. I always feel it's not good to allow them to spy on us," the Pearl of the Northern Region nodded. "As I know, the two little girls who can fly have excellent combat ability, don't they? With the assistance of Lady of Dawn, they probably can kill all of the demons. This is beyond the capabilities of the First Army. Only you can do it."

"Well..." Agatha hesitatively said, "In theory, they won't be in danger only when there are two demons. Otherwise, if the demons throw spears, they can hardly dodge at a short distance. Even if Andrea were to shoot a demon down, there would still be three demons..."

She gradually stopped talking, as she found out what she said not so convincing.

Since it was a war, the risk was unavoidable, not to mention this war was so important that it would determine the future of

humankind. To get an opportunity of survival, thousands of witches had fought with and been killed by the demons. Lightning should not get special treatment.

In fact, she had sensed Lightning's oddness since they had come to Fertile Plains. Though Lightning tried to hide it, Agatha, who had experienced the Battle of Divine Will, was not unfamiliar with this state, which was, the confusion after encountering an unimaginably powerful enemy. The strength of the enemy overpowered her and made her feel powerless. Even many Blessed Army witches who had been to the battlefield for many times could not get rid of it and had to use medicine or magic abilities to cure or wait to recover little by little by themselves.

As long as they could defeat the demons, Agatha did not mind the risk. She was willing to participate in any extremely dangerous plans if they were beneficial enough. She believed that other Taquila survivors would make the same choice.

Nonetheless, Lightning was different. Compelling her to confront with the demons in such state was not different from sending her to death.

Agatha feared no risks but she could not push others to the abyss, especially her partners and sisters.

After waking up again in Neverwinter, she realized that she had been changed a lot by these witches.

"Well..." Edith raised her eyebrows but did not insist, "How about driving the demons away? They can conceal themselves by using the Magic Ark. Then Lady of Dawn can try to find an opportunity to shoot at the demons. Even one is better than nothing. I think it's better than allowing the demons to spy on us."

Agatha looked at Iron Axe and said, "No problem. I'll inform the Special Action Team."

...

In the following days, a strange "chemistry" formed between the demons and the First Army.

Nearly every day a team of Devilbeasts would wander around the outer defense line, and sometimes two or three teams would appear. They came from different directions. Nevertheless, as long as it was within Sylvie's vision, their actions were clearly monitored by her. The First Army would know their whereabouts before they entered the range which could be seen by naked eye.

Since the demons probably failed to find an opportunity to launch an attack, they did not do anything except flying around.

At the very beginning, the demons caused certain chaos in the construction team. Several days later, people became accustomed to it and devoted to their work even when the demons appeared. After all, the "potential threat" was far away from them while the wages were more attractive.

The only "inharmonious part" came from Andrea.

Every time when a demon was shot and fell down, the crowd would burst into loud cheers.

It was completely unpredictable. Sometimes nothing would happen for a day, and sometimes the demons might be shot down for two or three times.

Most people did not know the existence of the Special Action Team, but they realized that the army was taking counteractions.

The workers even started a new type of gambling game.

That was to guess the doomsday of the demons.

They guessed how many demons would show up and how many could leave. This game became popular in their spare time.

As the construction went smoothly, the First Army soon advanced to the second section of the railway.

According to the combat plan, the railway line which was

unprotected by the Misty Forest would be equipped with a station every 50 kilometers. The blockhouse built with concrete and steel could facilitate a small number of First Army soldiers to defend against demons multiple times. Meanwhile, the vanguard unit could coordinate with the previously stationed troops, and the logistics would also be more convenient.

The area between the stations would be protected by the armored train which cruised on the railway. Even if the demons destroyed part of the rails, it would not be difficult to repair.

With these stations, it would be impossible for the demons to destroy the "dark river" in a short time. The stations were like nails which facilitated the First Army to take roots on this fertile land.

What they needed to do at present was to knock in the second nail—"Tower Station No.1".

Chapter 1081: A Quiet Night

The whole encampment lapsed into a dead silence after nightfall.

Everybody sank into deep slumber after working for a whole day, including the witches.

Yet Lightning was wide awake.

Her insomnia had started around half a month ago — or rather, she had been feeling restless ever since her departure from the Misty Forest. The marks of Maggie's beak began to throb again, reminding her of the experience on that day.

Lightning did not know whether the pain was real or not. She had tried many different methods to distract herself but none of them worked. The wound was still there. It neither aggravated nor disappeared but remained on her chest like a permanent scarlet stain that refused to come off.

Lightning was distraught. Every day, she stayed awake until three or four in the morning before falling into a short, restless sleep. Haunted by constant nightmares, she would wake up with a flinch at the slightest sound made around her.

Lightning let out an almost inaudible sigh. Out of the corner of her eyes, she saw Maggie lying sprawled across her bed in a deep slumber.

She tucked her wrinkled blanket under Maggie's armpits, slid off the bed and walked out of the room quietly.

The witches' encampment was laid at the center of the campsite, guarded by the God's Punishment Witches. As Lightning did not want to disturb them, she flew out of the campsite and landed on the half-completed railway quietly.

The moonlight slanted along the road and silvered the edge of the railway tracks. A night breeze sighed through the field, ruffling bushes and trees. Dimly, she could hear birds chirping and insects

sing. She would have liked a night like this before, but now she was just not in the mood to appreciate the beauty of nature.

Lightning did not even have the courage to look in Taquila's direction. She knew that the monster hiding in the dark was still watching her. Every time she sensed its gaze, her hand would automatically reach for her wound in the chest.

Looking at the crossties stretching across the field, Lightning felt bitter.

It had actually taken her a month to finally overcome her fear and fly over the low city wall of Neverwinter. Lightning knew she might never be able to directly confront the Senior Demons in Taquila, but she believed that as long as she continued with her rehabilitation program, she would, at least one day, be able to return to her original condition prior to the incident.

Yet the reality was ruthless. She not only lost the ability to summon her power at will but also had difficulties flying. What was worse, she even started to become scared of regular demons.

In the past, she and Maggie could beat four Mad Demons effortlessly.

But now, she could only tail the enemy at a distance, waiting for them to retreat.

In other words, she was a hindrance to the operation.

The thought almost brought Lightning to tears.

No matter how hard she tried to conceal her secret, people would eventually discover it.

Even Maggie, who was usually slow at understanding things, had noticed something different about her.

Perhaps one day, Maggie would go her own way, leaving her timid-self behind.

By then, what should she do?

"I'm so useless," Lightning mumbled as she crouched down and buried her head between her knees. "How can a person, so afraid of demons, be the captain of the Exploration Group? They'll definitely laugh at me if they know what a craven I am... I always regarded myself as the greatest explorer, but the truth is, I'm just a coward."

"Yes, you are," a voice in her head said reprimandingly. "They'll sooner or later know who you are and laugh at you."

"But I don't want this..." Lightning said and broke into a sob.

"Now you see the consequence of bragging. If you don't want anybody to mock you, you'd better leave for somewhere nobody knows. Otherwise, you'll be a laughing stock for sure."

"Is this the only way? To leave?"

"No, you can't leave," a voice said suddenly.

"Who's there?" Aghast, Lightning yelled and jerked her head upward. She saw a familiar figure not far away from her, with a pair of long ears and a tail wagging in the ghostly opaline white moonlight. "... Lorgar?" Lightning cried.

"Ahem..." The wolf girl answered on a cough. "As a disclaimer, it wasn't my intention to eavesdrop on you."

Lightning now noticed that Lorgar was drenched in sweat. Her olive skin, a typical feature of Mojins, was sparkling like dewy gemstones.

"Are you... on training?"

"Yes. I'm not as strong as an Extraordinary. Although I can transform into a wolf, I still need to strengthen my body. Otherwise, I'll become weak, let alone combatting," said Lorgar as she spread out her hands. "We haven't encountered any demons lately, and I've promised the chief not to leave the campsite. To make sure that I receive adequate physical training every day, I have to work out at night."

"I see..." Lightning mumbled, now completely back to the present. She took a deep breath, buried her face in her hands and asked, "Did you, hear everything?"

She did not even need an answer. Wolves normally had an acute sense of hearing.

Lightning felt the heat rise in her face and neck.

"Well..." Lorgar paused for a second and said, "I've never comforted anyone before, so I can't offer you solace. However, I want to tell you my father's story."

"He was born in the Wildflame clan and is a member of the Burnflame Family, but nobody expected him to be the chief of the clan at that time, because he has a big weakness compared to his eight brothers. My father doesn't like social events. He's afraid of hunting by himself, and hunting is a big social event by which the Mojins choose their chief. After all, a chief not only needs to manage affairs within his clan but also exert his influence on other tribes. Every clan would choose the best of their younger generations to showcase their power."

Lightning was at a loss for words. She could not believe what she had heard. The unsociable person whom Lorgar talked about had not only overshadowed everyone during the Neverwinter Sport Meeting but had also caught King Roland's attention. Was that man really Lorgar's father?

"To be honest, I didn't believe it when my father told me, so I went to check with my grandfather," Lorgar went on smilingly as she approached Lightning slowly and crouched down next to her. "But it was true. I asked my grandfather why he selected my father as the chief of our clan, and he said Guelz probably couldn't achieve anything by himself, but he is the strongest warrior in the clan with the support of his clansmen. So why not pick him? It's because clansmen should always support each other, and this is how a clan survives. A hunting event doesn't prove anything."

Lightning's heart missed a beat.

"I actually feel happy about... what my father and my elder brother did for me in Neverwinter," Lorgar said while dropping her ears. "My father did something he would have never done if it wasn't for me... He did something quite embarrassing."

"Hmm, r-really? You stormed off and went back to the Witch Building, leaving them in the castle hall alone. You said you didn't want to see them again, although I do admit that their outfits were a little inappropriate in that situation." thought Lightning.

"My grandfather probably wanted me to understand that courage not only comes from within but also from outside," said Lorgar slowly. "So why do you have to care so much about how other people look at you? If your team members in the Exploration Group come across a crisis, will you leave them alone?"

After a moment of silence, Lighting replied quietly, "... thank you."

"I've told you I'm not comforting you. I'm just telling you a story," said the wolf girl who jerked her head away. "So, you don't need to thank me for anything. Plus, I find the Exploration Group sort of interesting... As a group member, I'm obligated to cheer you up."

Lightning was on the verge of tears. She rubbed her eyes hastily, pretending it was a trick of winds. When she finally calmed herself down and was ready to speak, Lorgar suddenly turned around and clapped her hand over her mouth.

"Shh..."

"What's the matter?" After Lorgar lifted her hand, Lightning asked in hushed voice.

"Do you hear anything?"

Huh? Lightning raised her head and listened carefully. Other than the whistling wind, she heard nothing.

"Hang on... it seems the owls and the insects have stopped singing."

"Something is coming this way from there," Lorgar said while pricking up her ears, her eyes resting on the night sky in the east. "This whistle is... watch out!"

She grabbed Lightning by her waist, and the two girls rolled down a slope to the curb!

Just at that moment, they heard a deafening roar crack through the air above!

Chapter 1082: A Battle in the Darkness

"What just happened?"

Lightning felt her head swimming. By the time she returned to the present, she found herself surrounded by numerous long black needles as thick as a man's finger. These lusterless crystals landed in the vicinity of the railway, point down, quivering like black swords.

Then, a few more blasts from the encampment shattered the silence of the night.

"This is... an attack!"

The enemy had sent the Spider Demons to attack the Expedition Corp!

By the time Lightning realized what had happened, the enemy had started their second round. This time, however, the noise did not come from the sky but traveled through the trembling ground underneath, thudding as if a heavy object were smashed into the earth.

"Oh, no..." Lorgar muttered under her breath. "That's where the Longsong Cannons are."

It appeared that the demons first located the encampment before they attacked the cannons. Could they really do that in such a pitch-black night?

"Why hasn't the alarm gone off yet?"

"I've got to wake everybody up!" Lightning yelled. Since she did not take her flight suit or sigil with her when she sneaked out, she had to fly back to the campsite against the heavy fire above the encampment. At this thought, Lightning grabbed Lorgar by her arm, trying to hoist her up to her feet.

"You..." Lighting turned around. To her great surprise, she saw a

long needle half buried in Lorgar's leg, nailing the wolf girl into the ground. Blood oozed profusely from her wound and soaked her pants.

Lightning suddenly felt suffocating.

It was her fault that Lorgar got hurt...

"Don't be stupid," Lorgar said, grinning. "The needle would get me regardless. Probably my condition would have been even worse if I didn't meet you. Fortunately, there's no demons' blood on these stone needles, so I just got a scratch."

"What scratch! Your bone is broken," Lightning said within herself. From the volume of the blood, the needle might have reached Lorgar's main blood vessel. If that was the case, it should be handled very carefully. However, where could she find Nana now? If the Mad Demons came back, Lorgar would literally become a sitting duck, completely vulnerable and defenseless!

Lightning revolved a multitude of thoughts in her head rapidly but could not find a solution.

"Look," Lorgar said feebly as she put her hand on Lightning's shoulder. "You need to get to that big machine on the railway..."

"Do you mean the 'Blackriver'?" Lightning asked in surprise. "But..."

"Everybody should have heard the bombing by now," the wolf girl said painfully. "The problem is how we're going to deal with it. If my assumption is right, at least half of the enemy are coming for the Longsong Cannons. It seems to me that they're also using weapons other than stone needles. I don't know what's happening there, but if... if the demons get what they want, we would lose the only weapon that has a chance to repulse them. You know its possible consequence, don't you?"

If that happened, the Spider Demons would be able to pour down black needles at the encampment unscrupulously and break

through the entire defensive line.

Lightning nodded.

"Aargh... then hurry up..." Lorgar urged, pushing Lightning on the back. "Although this is the first place being attacked, it's actually the safest. I'm not their target anyway... Look over there..."

Lightning looked in the direction Lorgar pointed at and saw the wooden watchtower at the end of the railway had been chopped off by half as if it were engulfed by the darkness.

"So, run! To the 'Blackriver'—" the wolf girl shouted at the top of her lungs through her teeth. "Only you can do that now!"

She was right. Flying would be the fastest way to deliver a message to the armored train traveling between the front and Station No. 0.

Lightning clenched her fist. She cast one last glance at Lorgar before turning around reluctantly. Within a second, she soared into the air and zoomed toward the encampment.

A few gunshots reached her ears.

As Lorgar had predicted, the whole campsite was awakened. Although the soldiers did not know where their enemy came from, they all scrambled to their feet and armed themselves for the upcoming battle.

So did the witches.

God's Punishment Witches were always the first ones to get themselves ready. They were light sleepers who kept their armors on even in their sleep. When Lightning dashed back into her room, she found an anxious Maggie pacing up and down in agitation.

"Where have you been, coo?" Maggie asked, throwing herself onto Lightning in a hug that nearly knocked her flat. "Why didn't you tell me you were out for a walk, coo?"

"I'm sorry, but I have to head to the 'Blackriver' now. I'll fill you in later," said Lightning with a surge of guilt. She had thought that tactless as Maggie was, she would never understand what fear meant. However, she had been wrong. Maggie might not necessarily feel scared, but she did care for her friend.

"I'll come with you, coo."

"No, they need you here," Lightning said, although deep down inside, she really wanted to have Maggie in her company. "Sylvie needs you to help her monitor the encampment. The more people keep an eye on the demons, the better!"

"Cheer up! I can't drag everyone's feet anymore," Lightning reminded herself.

"Also, I need you to do one thing for me first," Lightning added as she put on her flight suit as fast as she could. She brushed Maggie's long hair from her forehead, held her face with both her hands and said, "Please promise me that you'll succeed in this mission. It's the most important task of the Exploration Group."

"Coo?" Maggie asked while blinking.

"Please find Nana and take her to the end of the railway. Lorgar is seriously injured and is currently lying there. Please make sure you bring her back, ok?"

Maggie bent her head firmly and said, "Coo!"

"Then I'll entrust the matter to you," said Lightning as she gently pressed her forehead to Maggie's. She then flew straight out of the room.

As she climbed, she noticed the reason why the alarm had not gone off in the first place.

The five watchtowers in the outer ring of the defensive line were now all gone. Apparently, they had been destroyed during the enemy's first attack. Those watchtowers should have been fortified strongholds equipped with concrete blockhouses. However, since

they had just started the construction of Tower Station No. 0, they had yet to erect web wires on the outer side of the trenches, let alone a complete set of fortifications.

What further unnerved Lightning was that the gunshots appeared to have come from the inner circle of the encampment, which meant that the soldiers were currently fighting against someone. Nevertheless, she had seen no sign that indicated the defensive line had been broken through so far. Although the enemy was still attacking the campsite, they seemed to be quite far away. So, who were the soldiers fighting against?

She started to understand how important her role was.

"Yes, I'm a coward."

"Yes, I lost to the Senior Demon."

"But there's still something I'm capable of..."

"Which is flying!"

"I admit I'm scared."

"As long as I don't look toward the north, I should be fine."

"I don't even need to face regular demons."

"I just need to fly straight to the railway. There's no excuse for me to be so timid anymore!"

Lightning sped up as she zoomed toward the forest along the "Black River".

"Faster, just a little faster!"

As she kept pushing herself, gradually, she felt her power come back. When she overcame her fear, the whole world around her became silent.

For the first time in such a long time, Lightning entered the Realm of Silence again after her awakening!

Chapter 1083: A Black Apparition

Danny leaped out of the bed when he heard the first blast.

In the next moment, something splattered against the roof before crumbs and chipped stones started to rain down from the ceiling. The whole house began to wobble violently.

"W-what happened?"

"Is it an earthquake?"

His companions were all startled. The pitch-black room soon sank into chaos.

"No, it's a raid!" The soldier closest to the door yelped as he snatched up his rifle. He was about to rush out when Danny pinned him down to the floor. "What are you doing?" the soldier barked.

"Don't move. They're still attacking us!" Danny growled.

As Danny had expected, soon a few more blasts reached their ears, and something hailed down at the roof again.

"D-Damn it, that is..."

In a cloud of dust, someone lit a candle. After the dark was dispersed by the dim candlelight, everybody sucked in their breath in horror.

Thousands of sharp black needles had pierced the ceiling. In the flickering light, they looked like human hairs hanging upside down.

"That was a Spider Demon..." The soldier on the ground swallowed hard. Most members of the sniper unit had participated in the first expedition, so they knew the Spider Demons pretty well. The soldier on the floor immediately realized what would have happened to him had he rushed out of the house.

"If I survive this battle, I'll buy two lamb legs and thank Miss Lotus in person," another soldier promised as he patted his chest.

The soldiers normally lived in a tent during a battle; but this time, the witches built a few concrete houses for them. Although they were not sure whether it was a decision made by the management team or not, the concrete dwellings had definitely saved them on this particular occasion. If they had lived in a tent, they would have been long dead by now.

"Don't be so pessimistic. I'm still looking forward to my wedding."

"You just want to fawn over Miss Lotus, don't you?"

"Nonsense. If he intends to fawn over someone, it has to be Miss Angel, Nana."

It was a narrow escape, but none of them looked very concerned about this raid. They quickly armed themselves with weapons and ammunition while jabbering.

Because they all knew one thing.

Death was unavoidable and inevitable. Rather than worrying about their unforeseeable future, it would be more practical to kill the enemy.

As the campsite became gradually alive with noises, Danny pushed open the door and dashed out of the room while ducking his head.

The few sentinels outside the barrack were long dead. The whole encampment was raucous: people were yelling; demons were howling; there were also gunshots and explosions everywhere. Nobody knew the number and whereabouts of the enemy. The watchtower was enveloped in an impenetrable darkness with no lights on to point them direction, as though these demons all had come out of nowhere.

Danny clambered straight up to the roof and sprinted in the direction where he heard the least gunshots, totally ignoring his desperate companions shouting behind him.

"I thought you would look for the place where most people are."

He heard Malt chuckle in his head.

This was the reason he liked fighting.

His partner would only appear when he threw himself into a battle.

"If there are many people, it means our guys are in an advantageous position. My presence would just help them finish off their enemy faster," Danny replied. "However, on-and-off gunshots indicate someone is having a bitter fight. They tell me that my bullet is in need."

"I'd told you before that it wasn't your fault— you can't save everyone on a battlefield."

"But at least I can save the ones I see," Danny said with a smile. "Don't worry. I feel good. I can see you better now."

Danny looked around. As he had expected, he saw his old partner float out of the darkness, running next to him.

Danny soon found a high point of the battleground as he proceeded. After he climbed up a tottering pile of iron cases, he immediately spied some Longsong Cannons standing in an open field in his vicinity. A few demons were using bunkers to have physical altercations with some artilleries. Apparently, the artilleries, not equipped with heavy weapons, were having a difficult time subduing the demons. They could not easily recover their encampment while the latter was spearing.

Many people were lying sprawled in pools of blood, penetrated by bone spears on the road leading to the artillery field.

"How did they get here?"

"I have no idea, but I'm now going to finish them," Danny said as he raised his long gun and aimed it at a demon who sneaked up behind a barrack. If this demon succeeded in his attempt, the

artillerymen would suffer an onslaught. However, the demon was now too focused on its own undertaking to realize that a sniper was right behind it.

Danny pulled the trigger without the slightest hesitation. As a cloud of Red Mist erupted from the back of its head, the demon fell off the roof and plummeted to the ground.

Danny could literally hit anyone within 100 meters in the moonlight.

"Good job. Watch out for your left-hand side. Someone's coming."

Danny then saw five or six soldiers crouch at a corner, inching toward the edge of the wall, planning to have a desperate struggle with the demons despite the raining spears.

"Very brave fellows but pretty silly as well. Without a shield, you can't possibly survive the spearing attack," Danny muttered under his breath, his lips curling up into a smile. "How about hanging in there for a bit longer?"

He quickly fired three shots, and the bullets landed right beside the soldiers' feet just when they were about to make their move. Frightened by the whistle of the bullets and resultant dust, they shrank back.

"They would bite your head off if they knew it was you," Malt said apprehensively.

"Hahaha." Danny broke into a laughter. "Let them be." He re-aimed his gun at the Mad Demons and shot in rapid succession. Deterred by the gunshots, the demons stopped attacking the barrack and hid themselves.

Just then, a loud noise cracked through the air above.

"Watch out! Look over there!"

No sooner had Malt finished his warning than several shadows

descended from the sky and dived to the encampment.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

The earth quavered when the shadows hit the ground.

In the moonlight, Danny found out in his great dismay that they were actually three giant black stone pillars! The stone pillars started to billow clouds of Red Mist after they landed. They sizzled just like the steam engine invented by His Majesty.

But he soon realized they were not machines.

Three thick slabs peeled off the big pillars, producing a ton of "blood". The pillars were then divided into three parts, each of which contained a demon! These demons were enveloped in a fluid-filled sac, just as a baby floated in its mother's womb. After the sac was drained of blood, the demons awoke, revealing their gruesome tusks.

A bullet landed precisely on one of the Mad Demons' head when it walked out of a black stone pillar.

"Crack!"

The demon staggered and then slumped against the stone pillar with a thud.

"So this is how you came here," Danny snorted as he reloaded his gun. "Why didn't you just stay in there since you weren't fully awake anyway? Come as you like, but I'll kill every single one of you. Watch me, Malt!"

Chapter 1084: In Battle Fumes

The battle became fiercer as the enemy continued to attack.

With a whoosh, a dozen stone pillars plunged from above. Thick ashes and smoke, mixed with the Red Mist, permeated the air and overspread the pale moon. Chipped stones splattered against the ground, forcing people to bow their heads. The whole situation turned into a sort of doomsday disaster. One stone pillar landed right on one of the iron cases. The shockwaves sent Danny flying across the battlefield. By the time he realized what had happened, he had laid in a heap on the ground.

"Aargh... damn it," Danny muttered between his coughs, feeling a pain lance through his chest. Meanwhile, he also tasted blood in his mouth. "Malt, are... are you OK?"

"I'm fine," Malt replied next to him anxiously, "but you are hurt!"

"I've probably got a broken rib," said Danny through his teeth, wincing. "It's not a big deal though. As long as I can still pull the trigger, I can continue to fight..."

He fumbled in the darkness for his gun frantically, a little panic until he finally found it.

"No, you should run, as fast as you can!" Malt implored.

Danny struggled to draw himself up and leaned against a dented iron case behind him.

It almost cost him all his strength.

He saw a towering black stone pillar loom against the cloud of Red Mist, about to open.

Danny raised his gun slowly and placed it on his shoulder while using his knee to stabilize the weapon. Since the target was just ten meters away, he did not think he would miss it.

"Stop! That's enough! Why don't you leave?"

Danny could hear Malt scream. He also wanted to ask himself the same question.

"Because I don't want to leave the battlefield and I don't want to lose you..."

The moment he fired, the slab collapsed.

He hit it.

Before the demon tore the sac open, the bullet had penetrated his forehead.

This time, however, the demon did not fall flat on its face.

It walked out of the pillar while shaking what remained of the sac off his body and stopped before Danny.

It was an armored demon much larger than a Mad Demon. As it drew itself to its full, magnificent height, it cast Danny into a long shadow that spread across the sky. In the utter darkness, Danny could only see its red eyes glinting maliciously.

Danny reloaded the gun and pulled the trigger again.

With a clink, sparks flew off the demon's chest and pale blue waves rippled across its body.

The demon fixed Danny with a cool stare and slouched toward him.

It did not draw out its weapon but continue to shuffle toward him with a supercilious look on its face.

Danny repeated the same action mechanically. He reloaded the gun and fired, but his bullets seemed to have lost their magic touch.

"No..." Malt broke into a sob in despair.

Upon the fourth shot, dazzling flames suddenly erupted from the demon's chest.

"Bang!"

With an earsplitting crash, the demon was sent flying across the field and straight into an iron case.

Danny stood transfixed on the ground, watching a tendril of smoke escape from the muzzle in amazement.

Then he saw a man in front of him.

"Run, mortal," said the man as he turned around. "This is not something you can handle. We'll take over from here."

The man was carrying a rifle with a huge caliber, the bullets around his waist as thick as his wrist. Apparently, they were not something a normal man could carry. Further, the man was plastered with the same armor the demon was wearing.

"Special Unit of Strategies and Tactics".

Those were the words that came to Danny's mind at that moment.

This unit had become the most mysterious unit of the First Army since their debut during the first expedition. They never attended their training sessions, so nobody knew exactly how many of them there were and where they were stationed. The only thing he knew about them was that they were all picked by His Majesty himself and were considered as the most powerful troops in Neverwinter.

"Grrrrrr—"

The demon crawled out of the overturned iron case and hollered angrily. It finally changed its haughty attitude and reached for the giant double-edged sword on its back.

"Hmm, a Senior Demon promoted from Lord of Hell? No wonder you have such a strong magic reaction," the man said to the demon as much as he said to himself as he dashed toward his enemy fearlessly. "We've been waiting for this moment for a long time!"

Several soldiers armored in the same fashion followed at his heels. As the group joined the battle, the situation gradually

changed. Despite their heavy load, they moved and walked much faster than a regular soldier. As they slowly cornered the enemy, their attack turned more brutal and even savage. After they exhausted their ammunition, instead of using bunkers, they switched to bayonets and started to stab the enemy ferociously.

The demon was actually swifter than it appeared. However, surrounded by the four raging warriors who were apparently out of their minds, it finally yielded to its fate. Its blue ripples started to fade.

No wonder they were picked by the king.

Yet this was also Danny's battlefield.

Danny would never back off unless he died.

He forced himself to sit up, supported his gun with his own body and aimed it at the battlefield.

When he shot down a Mad Demon that attempted to launch a surprise attack at the Special Unit of Strategies and Tactics from behind, the warrior turned around and cast him a glance from a distance.

Danny pulled open the bolt and took a sharp intake of the air saturated with the smell of gunpowder in a way an addict inhaled heroin. It was a mixed feeling of pain and satisfaction.

"Doesn't it feel good, Malt?"

...

"Darn! What the hell is the Artillery Battalion doing?"

"Can't they stop those raining stone needles?"

"I hope they didn't send newbies to the front."

Down the trenches in the outer ring of the encampment, some soldiers were complaining behind shields, and Fishball was one of them. Although he was a member of the anti-aircraft machine gun squad, he did not think it a good idea to operate the machine guns

when their enemy happened to be something more grisly than flying Devilbeasts.

After they had been wakened up, they had immediately manned the defensive line according to the predetermined procedure. They soon bombarded a few demons with crossfire and mortars on their way, so the defensive line remained intact. The soldiers on duty were confused as to who they were killing next. When everybody thought their mission would be exterminating loose invaders, they received a new order from their superior, who instructed them not to leave the trenches under any circumstances whilst preparing themselves for a fight against their real enemy.

A group of demons was coming to attack the campsite from both the east and the south. They were the main force of the enemy.

Fish Ball thought of the expedition that had taken place a few months ago, where swarms of demons had sprinted toward them at a tremendous speed. It was a chilling scene to behold. Fortunately, the First Army had got themselves well prepared. Their gunfire had stopped the demons somewhere 200 meters away from the encampment.

Yet now, there were no fortified blockhouses around the defensive line, and artillery reinforcements had yet to show up. Every now and then, a blast cracked like a whip through the air above them. As they could practically see nothing through the inky darkness, Fish Ball was not sure whether they would be as lucky as the last time.

"They're coming!" Suddenly, someone yelled. "They are 1,500 meters away from us. Everybody, stay alert!"

"1,500 meters? We can barely see anything within 200 meters!" Fish Ball complained within himself. He knew the order was given by the witch who possessed the Eye of Magic. However, as a soldier, he must obey orders. Under no circumstances could he desert his post. Fish Ball clenched his teeth, ready to fire.

Just at that moment, the train let out a long shrill whistle in the distance!

Chapter 1085: Attack and Defense

"Could you make it a little faster?" Lightning hovered beside the conductor, so tempted to push the train forward herself. However, she knew that even Maggie could not move such a colossal machine barehanded. "Could you shove more coals into the boiler?"

"Haha, the boiler would burst under high air pressure, little girl!" said the conductor, a silver-haired old man who looked more like a kind-hearted next-door neighbor than a soldier. He yelled back over the clunk of the train, "Don't worry. It isn't that easy to beat the First Army, even for the demons from Hell."

Lightning pursed her lips and fell silent.

Although the train was running at an enormous speed, Lightning was still quite anxious. It had not taken her a very long time to find the "Blackriver", for the train was, after all, too large to miss. She had actually startled everybody on the train when she had burst in. Other than that, everything went as planned. As a member of the Witch Union, she had soon convinced the conductor, who had then ordered his crew to turn the train about.

Yet this did not ease her mind at all.

After the train turned around and headed in the direction of Tower Station No. 1, Lightning finally got hold of Sylvie. The message from Sylvie gave her a leaden feeling in her stomach: the demons had caught the First Army off-guard, and their main force was now hurrying to the encampment from two different directions. If the First Army did not get the support of the artillery anytime sooner, the situation was going to be quite precarious.

After receiving the news, Lightning could not feel as optimistic as the old conductor anymore.

The only good thing was that Maggie had successfully located

injured Lorgar. The latter was now out of danger after receiving Nana's treatment.

"It's noisy and windy out there. Don't you want to come in? I don't like yelling all the time," the conductor said as he took a deep pull on his pipe. He leaned against the window and said, "It's wobbly but at least it's warm in here. The boiler works much better than a fireplace!"

"No... thanks," Lightning declined the offer while casting a glance at the rickety dashboard. She shook her head and said, "I'm fine."

The conductor was right. It was indeed the fastest the "Blackriver" could get.

If the train ran a little faster than this, it would definitely fall apart even if the boiler could manage such a crazy speed.

"I know you're still worried about the encampment. Do you have any family members or friends there?"

"Yes," Lightning answered with an apprehensive look.

"So do I," the conductor said as he stroked his beard. "I have two actually!"

"Oh?" Lightning was a bit surprised. She had thought otherwise, for the conductor did not seem to be very worried at all.

"I used to be a miner and I had four children before. My first one died of a chill, and the other three survive the arrival of King Wimbledon," the old man explained smilingly. "My two sons used to be as frail and weak as mice. However, after they joined the army, they've changed a lot. That's why I'm confident in the First Army. An army with people like that would not be so easily defeated."

Lightning doubted the credibility of his words, but she asked, "What about the other one?"

"He's right on this train," said the conductor as he tapped his

pipe. "He's the lookout who found you approach the train in the first place."

The old man paused for a second and then went on, looking quite proud of himself, "His Majesty brought so many changes to this town, and I wanted to do something for him in return. It was quite boring to stay at the mine all day, to be honest. I reckoned it would be much more fun to travel around. When his Majesty came to hire machine engine operators to operate the train, I applied for the conductor position. With a stroke of luck, I got the job."

Lightning twitched her lips and was about to say something when the telephone on the control panel suddenly rang.

"Father, I just saw Tower Station No. 1! There's a fight going on there and I can see flames and flickers of light!" The voice on the other end of the line was so loud that even Lightning could hear it clearly outside the window.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to call me father in the army?" the old man bellowed over the phone. "Keep an eye on the front. I'm going to sound the alarm and tell them that the reinforcements are coming!"

He then tugged on his whiskers at Lightning and said, "See? They can't be defeated that fast, right?" Then, the old conductor turned around, pulled the string behind him and hollered, "Let's go, lads!"

"Woooooo—"

About seven minutes later, with a deep groan, the "Blackriver" slowed down and joined the battle after a long, low-pitched whistle.

Stones needles were smashed to pieces as they hit the railway. When the black stone and the steel clashed, a jet of sparks flew off the inky locomotive.

Several demons approached the railway, attempting to stop the giant steel beast from advancing, believing that they could stop the

trundling train barehanded. They all, as a result, got sucked under the train and were crushed into a pulp.

No living creature could possibly stop a train, no matter how slow the train appeared.

In the meantime, the machine guns at the front and the rear of the armored train started to rake through the area. Caught in the crossfire, the demons had no time to take refuge. Their bone spears were virtually ineffective on the "Blackriver".

Lightning, on the other hand, had flown into the turret.

"Sylvie, where's our target?"

"Right in front of you around 3,300 meters away," Sylvie answered, apparently having noticed the train as well. She blurted out the firing parameters at once. "We have a clear field. Ready to go!"

The artillerymen started working as soon as the train came to a complete halt.

...

Sylvie could now see that the enemy's main force enter their shooting range.

There were just around 5,000 demons this time, much less than when they had fought at the Northbound Slope. Like some random bandits, the demons were in quite a loose formation. The First Army thus pretty much prevailed the entire battlefield, making the whole situation a little odd and bloodcurdling.

A short way farther on, the vision of the Eye of Magic distorted.

An impenetrable blackness rose above the ground, blocking the view of the Magic Eye. However, this was different from an interference of a God's Stone of Retaliation. An anti-magic area generated by a God's stone was a clean-cut block, whereas the black vision ahead was more like something else... like a living being.

It came so suddenly, for there had been nothing just a second ago.

The long needles pelting down at the campsite and the stone pillars had all come from that black mantle.

This was the toughest and the most intense battle Sylvie had ever experienced. The whole battle, from the ambush to the attack, gave her a sinister feeling. She could not see clearly, and it appeared that everything the demons had done so far was targetting her.

She had no time to think about how the enemy had got so close to the encampment unnoticed. Her sole focus was on the "Blackriver".

Since she did not know the exact location of the demons, she had to make adjustments according to the landing spots of the bullets.

After she waited for a long time in anxiety, the "Blackriver" finally produced its first thunderous roar. Scorching flames lit the encampment, and firelight reflected off the gleaming train!

The cannonball traveled even faster than the sound.

It penetrated the thick air, weaving through the darkness as the air rippled behind it.

Chapter 1086: A Sharp Confrontation

At the same time, the demons started to charge both flanks of First Army.

Within two minutes, they were 500 meters closer, darting from somewhere 1,500 meters away to somewhere less than 1,000 meters from the encampment. If this had happened in broad daylight, the First Army would have been able to see the enemy clearly at this distance. However, the poor visibility at night significantly impacted their vision. Although Sylvie had notified the liaison officer about the demons' movement immediately, the First Army had failed to react fast enough.

What was more astonishing was that the demons actually dropped prone on their stomachs when artillery shells landed near them. With their strong limbs, they crawled pretty fast. As the demons were spread out, the machine guns were much less effective.

Sylvie remembered that the machine gun squad used to be invincible. They could block attacks in any forms and annihilate every single enemy within their shooting range as fast as farmers reaped their crops. Within a second, they could cause considerable damage to their enemy. The unification war of Graycastle and the defeat of the church had provided perfect examples.

However, this time, bullets kept missing the demons. With them crawling forward in the dark, it was hard to kill the demons.

Sylvie warned the front at once. However, since the soldiers could not see where the bullets were hitting, they weren't able to correct their aim.

Fortunately, the attack on the other side was effective. As the black mantle could only block the Magic Eye but not artillery shells, the shells streaked across the battlefield from 3,000 meters away. Firelight lit up the inky sky. Broken limbs and chipped black

stones were thrown out from the black shroud as the shells exploded.

Based on the area she was blind to and the rate at which the demons' projectiles were fired, Sylvie believed that the Spider Demons had formed columns. It was the only way could they fill such a small space with as many Spider Demons as possible.

"Keep firing! March forward in 20 meters increments!" Sylvie shouted over the Sigil of Listening.

"Got it!"

The most important thing at the moment was to stop the enemy from launching any more long-distance strikes. As long as the defensive line was still there, the demons could not easily break through. The closer they were from the encampment, the easier it would be for the soldiers to see them. Additionally, First Army had other weapons besides machine guns.

If the defensive line was broken, the whole army could face annihilation.

Fish Ball was praying at the front that no stone needles would land on his head. He came to a shooting position while clenching his teeth.

In fact, he was quite surprised that he had the courage to dash out of the trench. If this had happened in the past, he would have probably wetted himself already while imploring the commander to spare his life.

Perhaps the comment "you aren't a craven" or the roar of the artillery behind him made him bold. In the end, he managed to remain at his post, thus avoiding the fate of being the first military officer executed for desertion. Although he was just a unit leader, he still needed to set a good example for his team. Yet Fish Ball knew that he would normally never agree to take such a risky assignment, as he treasured his life more than money.

Fish Ball had to admit that the army was an incredible place. Once the first soldier darted out of the trench against hailing gunfires, the rest would automatically follow. When the intense atmosphere reached a certain point, his brain simply stopped functioning properly and all he could do was to follow the procedure mechanically.

"Captain, the cartridge has been loaded!" his men yelled.

Fish Ball took a deep breath and lowered the muzzle of the Mark I. Although he was a member of the anti-aircraft machine gun squad, the gun he was using was still equipped with a rear sight and an optical sight, which let him aim at the demons on the ground. The two baffle plates on either side of his machine gun were mainly to protect him from the spears pelting down from the sky. Once he lowered the plates, his back would be unprotected. Therefore, apart from praying, he could only draw himself as close to the plates as possible to avoid being hit.

As long as he did not die on the spot, Miss Nana would be able to heal him.

In order for Miss Nana to do so, the field medics needed to rescue the wounded as fast as possible.

Trying to overcome his fear, Fish Ball growled as he pulled the trigger. The thick night air was soon filled with bullets.

As the battlefield was permeated with loud blasts, Fish Ball could hardly tell the attack of the Longsong Cannons from that of the Spider Demons.

Occasionally, black stone needles brushed past his ear or hit the baffle plates. Being so close to death, Fish Ball was numbed to everything and could only think of continuing to shoot.

"Ammo out! Reload!"

"C-coming!"

...

"Where's the cartridge?"

"Here!"

...

When he finally saw the silhouette of the demons, Fish Ball heard the bolt click. He had just exhausted the third cartridge of bullets.

"Reload!"

"Didn't anyone hear me?"

"Hey, what are you guys doing?"

Fish Ball wheeled around abruptly and found the other two soldiers lying on the ground with crimson-stained stone needles piercing their bodies.

Fish Ball stiffened for a second before he realized what had happened. He yelled at the top of his lungs, "Field medics, somebody needs help here!"

Nothing but thunderous roars answered him.

At that moment, the mortars finally started firing. Hundreds of shells rose into the air and rained down, carpeting the area between 400 and 800 meters away from the defensive perimeter.

For a split second, flames blossomed above the ground, lighting up on both the demons and the blood stains on the baffle plates of his machine gun.

...

This was the moment Sylvie had been waiting for.

The 'Blackriver' had weakened the Spider Demons' attack, but didn't fully stop them. Every now and then, they threw another stone pillar at the soldiers, causing more and more injuries to the First Army. Even though Agatha, Shavi and Molly were now fully supporting the army, it was impossible for them to monitor the entire 200-meter defensive line.

The only thing Sylvie could do was to let the front know who needed help when she was not giving firing instructions.

Then she heard Maggie's voice coming from the Sigil of Listening.

"This is the artillery, coo! The Taquila Witches have killed all the demons that invaded the encampment, coo. Commander Van'er says he's ready to fire and hopes that you could give him instructions, coo!"

Sylvie balled her hand into a fist.

"Stay there. It will be faster for me to communicate via the sigil than by phone!"

"Noted, coo."

Just when the artillery was about to use the four Longsong Cannons to strike back, the demons' attack suddenly dropped off. It seemed that they knew that this would happen.

A loud, piercing whistle cracked through the air, and the Army of the Demons immediately ebbed away, leaving behind those at the front line.

Chapter 1087: Loss and Victory

...

When Anna descended to the underground headquarters, she immediately sensed the oppressive atmosphere in the room.

Everybody rose to their feet and bowed their heads as they saw her. "Your Royal Highness, ma'am!" they said in a chorus.

Iron Axe went down to his knee and said, "I'm sorry for having you come down here. I should have anticipated that the enemy would raid the encampment at night and take extra precautions accordingly. I sincerely apologize for my negligence."

"Please don't blame yourselves," said Anna as she waved her hand. "I'm just concerned about the situation at the front like everybody else. I want to know what's going on. Is everybody... OK?"

Anna was still not accustomed to the fact that she was now the queen. She felt particularly embarrassed when Wendy, Agatha, and the other witches bowed to her. She actually preferred to treat all the other witches as her sisters, although she had never specifically said that aloud.

When the campsite had been attacked, she had immediately been escorted by both the God's Punishment Witches and her guards to the underground shelter. However, Anna would have rather fought with the others like she had done during the Months of Demons than being strictly protected.

Yet she knew as the queen, she had to accept some inevitable changes.

She just hoped that her presence could put everyone's mind at ease.

Iron Axe, surprisingly, looked hesitant. After a moment of silence, he answered, "Your Highness, the battle didn't go well."

"Can you tell me more about it?"

"Certainly. We were actually just discussing it," said Iron Axe, who cast a glance at Ferlin Eltek. The latter gave a nod of comprehension and opened his notebook.

"Based on the reports from the field medics, 200 killed and 700 wounded in First Army," Morning Light replied heavily.

"However, these are just the initial rough estimates. We got those numbers in quite a hurry. The actual casualties will likely be higher, since Miss Nana... can't treat so many people at once."

200 deaths. This number almost equaled the number of casualties the decisive battle against the Church. However, that massive battle was the final battle of the war with the Church. This was the very first battle with the demons after they started advancing north. There was still a long way to go before First Army reached the Taquila ruins.

No wonder Iron Axe was disconcerted by the outcome of this battle.

Anna had seen the wounded soldiers who were covered in blood, lying on the ground in a line. The air in the hospital was saturated with the smell of blood and the sound of inarticulate groans. Nana definitely could not cure all of the wounded at once. For the maimed soldiers and those who suffered severe internal organ damage, she could only cure five to six people at most in one day. Therefore, in order to save more people, she had to apply her magic power to the ones most in need.

For example, Nana would only heal fatal wounds for the soldiers who were wounded in the chest or abdomen. For those who sustained minor injuries, she would instruct the field medics to stitch up their wounds after the soldiers drank Cleansing Water. As for those who had relatively severe injuries, she had to leave their wounds open before she treated them the next day. The soldiers would thus rely on the medicine made from sleeping ferns

and coltsfoot to reduce pain. As to whether they would survive the night or whether the liquid medicine would cause addiction, the field medics did not have time or effort to thoroughly think about these problems.

It was not easy to accurately apply magic power to a specific body part in such an intense environment. Anna was surprised at how much Nana had improved. Compared to the little school girl who used to faint at the sight of blood, Nana was now an experienced and professional military doctor.

"I'll advise His Majesty to persuade Countess Spear from Fallen Dragon Ridge to send us reinforcements," said Anna slowly. "She can help the field medics to save more people. By the way, how did the demons sneak in?"

"I guess... the enemy took advantage of the limits of my Magic Eye," said Sylvie, who apparently looked very frustrated. "The Devilbeast scouts they sent earlier were probably trying to learn how far my Magic Eye can see, and I was completely unaware they were watching me..."

"We should have thought about that," Agatha put in self-reprovingly. "After the battle at North Slope, the demons apparently noticed Sylvie's presence. They used Devilbeasts to first test out how far her Eye of Magic can see based on our reactions to them. Then, their army gathered outside that range and raided us after night fell. They started attacking us the very moment we retreated from Tower Station No.1, when our encampment was the most unguarded."

"That being said, this wasn't anybody's fault," Morning Light comforted. "If we really wanted to deceive the enemy, we'd have had to ignore the Devilbeasts when they approached us. This would be against the protocols we received during our training. Even if we knew the enemy's plan beforehand, it would be impossible maintain a scharade with thousands of soldiers and regular workers. In other words, the enemy would have learned

the limits of the Magic Eye at somepoint anyways. Even if they didn't ambush us at Tower Station No. 1, they would have done so at No. 2 or No. 3."

"If I remember correctly, the shooting range of the Spider Demons is around two to three kilometers. Since they are fairly slow, it normally takes them quite a while to enter our firing range and be spotted by Sylvie. Is it just pure luck that they weren't spotted in the first place?" Anna asked in confusion. "I'm not really familiar with the operation. Correct me if I'm wrong. The First Army should have their own scouting team, shouldn't they? For example, they can use hydrogen balloons at the encampment."

"You're always so attentive to details, Your Highness," Iron Axe replied while placing his hand on his chest. "Generally speaking, the First Army gathers information in three ways: through Sylvie, through Maggie and Lightning, and by themselves. However, the army scouts are just supplementary and only for contingencies."

After hearing the explanation from the commander-in-chief, Anna finally had a basic understanding of the intelligence system of the First Army. During the Graycastle unification war, this system had worked pretty well. Yet when they fought against the demons, they soon noticed some big flaws in this system.

Nothing running on the ground could compete against the Devilbeasts flying in the sky.

This meant there was a limit in how much information the army scouts could obtain. Once they went beyond that limit, their mission could be highly risky and even life-threatening, and dead people can't bring back information. The Devilbeasts were able to hide in clouds, giving them an absolute advantage over scouts on the ground. As the Fertile Plains was flatter than a pancake, they could dive down anytime like a hawk snatching up a rabbit.

This disadvantage significantly restricted the amount of information the First Army could collect. In this situation, they

could barely assist Sylvie. Meanwhile, the flying demons could prey on any soldiers sent out to scout while escaping the scrutiny of the Magic Eye. There was basically nothing the First Army could do about it.

A phrase suddenly flashed across Anna's mind.

A phrase that Roland had a mixed feeling about every time he mentioned it.

That was "air supremacy".

The party who had the command of the sky dominated the war.

Apart from "air supremacy", there were also some other phrases beyond her understanding which Roland said from time to time, such as the Black Ribbon and Akiyama...

Anna shook her head, trying to put these thoughts behind her. She asked, "Based on your description, the Spider Demons should have reached the third layer of the defensive line by the time we saw them. Was it because of the poor lighting at night that we failed to notice them?"

"That's one of the reasons, Your Highness," Ferlin Eltek replied. "The General Staff believes... that those monsters were probably waiting for us there from the beginning."

Anna blinked in mild surprise and asked, "Are you saying... that they were hiding right underneath us?"

"That's right. This is the only explanation that makes sense as to why these giant creatures suddenly emerged within shooting range," Ferlin confirmed in a grave tone. "I asked Miss Sylvie. She told me it costs her a lot of magic power to see through solid matter. When she does that, she can't see very far. It seems the Devilbeasts were also diverting Miss Sylvie's attention while testing out how far she can see. Once she focused solely on the sky, she would not have excess magic power to also monitor things underground."

"So this is why the demons successfully raided the encampment?" Anna questioned herself in silence.

If both Sylvie and the demons were stationary, it would be a lot easier for Sylvie to notice the movement below. The blackness Sylvie had seen was probably not to cover the demons, but rather to distract Sylvie from the Spider Demons when they came out of hiding.

Now they knew they were dealing with a very difficult enemy. The demons had not only come up with a strategy that countered First Army's operation methods, but they were also extremely proficient in their use of magic power.

It was no wonder that a suffocating atmosphere had settled over First Army's headquarters.

This was definitely not a good sign.

What would Roland do if he were here?

While Anna was trying to come up with some encouraging words, Edith suddenly burst into a fit of laughter.

"Why all the long faces like you just lost a battle? We just gained a major victory!" She said while chuckling. "Am I in the wrong meeting?"

Chapter 1088: Just a Beginning

"Lady Edith..." Ferlin reminded her in a hushed voice. "We just lost over 200 people. What major victory are you talking about?"

"Only... a little over 200," the Pearl of the Northern Region interjected. "What about the demons? 50 of them sneaked in the campsite, including a Senior Demon. They should be responsible for all the casualties of the First Army. It appears that we suffered a great loss at the first glance, but there are at least 2,000 casualties among the enemy on the defensive line, not to mention that this is just a very rough estimate. There were also numerous demons blasted to pieces when they attempted to flee. It may take a few days for us to obtain the exact number. Am I right, Miss Sylvie?"

"Well..." Sylvie said hesitantly, "That's what the Eye of Magic saw."

"Ms. Agatha, I guess you've never been a commander in a war over the past 400 years, have you?" asked Edith as she turned to the Ice Witch.

Agatha's brows were furrowed. She said, "During the Battle of Divine Will, it was mandatory for the witches in the Union to learn how to fight against demons. I used to be a researcher at the Quest Society and fought them once when exploring the ruins..."

"I'm talking about a war," Edith snapped, leaning forward while gazing at Agatha compellingly.

"Edith— " Iron Axe said, trying to put a pause on this awkward conversation.

"Why?" At that moment, Anna blurted out, jerking everyone back to the present. "Why do you ask her that? As far as I know, you were only a commander back in the Northern Region and shouldn't have experienced a major war either."

This was a particularly tricky question that would have easily

fanned Edith's fury had it been put by somebody else. However, Anna communicated it in such a gentle and dignified manner that no one felt the question threatening.

Perhaps, the innocent and serious look in the azure of her eyes naturally calmed everybody down.

The glint in Edith's eyes faded away. The next moment she placed her hand on her chest and replied quietly, "You're right. I didn't have war experience, but someone else here did..." She broke off and then continued, "From her look, I instantly know we won this battle."

Her?

The people in the room looked in the direction Edith pointed out and saw at the end of the long table, the representative of Taquila, Phyllis, sitting there in a daze, with a cup of tea in her hand, her lips curling up into a smile. Every now and then, she took a little sip of the tea as if savoring some tasty drink. This was not normal for the Taquila witches. As they had lost all the sensations, the pleasure of eating and drinking were denied them. Food was simply a basic life necessity to help them self-perpetuate.

Despite the fierce discussion, Phyllis was completely not paying attention to the meeting. Even though everyone was now staring at her, her mind seemed to still be somewhere else.

It was after Wendy pushed her in the back that she finally jerked herself out of the trance.

"Oh, so where were we?" The God's Punishment Witch asked blankly on a cough. "I was thinking about something very important and wasn't paying attention to your discussion. Well, does Your Highness have some questions for me?"

"..." There was an awkward silence.

It was surprising to see that an ancient witch, who had been living for 400 years, lie in the same fashion as mortals. Phyllis was

clearly daydreaming, but she unblushingly turned her lack of attention into a very poor lie that she was dwelling on some serious undertakings.

"Haha."

Somebody sniggered, and then everybody laughed. The tension in the room was immediately relieved.

"Looks like I don't need reiterate my question now," Anna said while shaking her head in amusement.

Edith rose, surveyed the room, and said, "The demons suffered a greater loss. They fled but we stayed. There's no damage whatsoever to Tower Station No. 1, so where does the talk of defeat come from? His Majesty once said to me that a loss means a failure to accomplish a predetermined goal. Apparently, the demons didn't get what they wanted. I would even like to say that the commander of the demons made a very serious mistake."

"A mistake?" The people on the floor were all astounded at Edith's conclusion. It did not seem to them that the ambush last night was a failure. It had been well planned out and successfully executed. The demons' accurate control of their magic power might not necessarily look very impressive. After all, they had been constantly upgrading their magic skills over the past thousands of years through numerous wars. However, their quick and effective reaction to firearms definitely said something about their learning ability, for there had been completely no communication between human beings and demons until the outbreak of the war at the Northbound Slope.

Everyone started to realize that the demons were nothing like any of the enemy they had encountered before. Although the demons had once almost eradicated the human race from Fertile Plains and destroyed the witch empire, nobody had personally witnessed that dust-laden history. The past thus gradually faded into oblivion, leaving only a thin thread of memory that would

easily snap and float off with time.

It was until the outbreak of this war that people finally caught a glimpse of the mysterious history and started to feel a little scared. Nevertheless, nobody had shared their fear.

They realized that the demons were far stronger than the demonic beasts on the Barbarian Land.

Apart from their magic power and enormous physical strength, the demons had developed a high level of civilization.

They even possessed knowledge unknown to human beings.

When mankind could no longer use excuses such as "the demons relied on the power and magic granted by Gods", and when the notion that man was the smartest creature on the continent was challenged for the first time, the shock was absolutely ineffable.

Immediately, men started to question themselves and overlooked the potential problems among the demons. That was why everybody was curious when Edith said the demons had lost the battle.

"What's their mistake then?" Anna asked instantly.

"They're too arrogant, Your Highness," Edith answered firmly. "They first stirred the encampment, then seized the artillery, and finally drove the army straight in. If they were facing a knightage or an old-school army, they would have won. However, the First Army isn't any common army. The demons only saw the change in our weapons but overlooked our soldiers. This is their biggest mistake!"

Everybody straightened up to listen to her speech.

"They only dispatched around 50 demons throughout the whole operation. This indicates that it wasn't easy for them to carry out their plan. They should have made the best use out of this plan, but what did they actually do? They sent the 50 demons to various places, including the barracks, the trenches and the artillery," the

Pearl of the Northern Region spoke eloquently. "The commander of the demons is definitely not a fool. It's obvious that it believes ten demons would be more than sufficient to crush us. Isn't it too presumptuous?"

Anna somewhat understood the implication behind Edith's words. She clenched her fist and said slowly, "If they didn't make this mistake... if they treated us as equal..."

"Then they would have never thought that only 50 demons would defeat us. Instead, they would kill as many soldiers as possible," Edith cut in with a nod. "Suppose all the demons rushed to the barracks, including the Senior Demon, while their army waited at the rear, what would happen after the Spider Demons sneaked in?"

Anna felt a chill running down her spine.

The reason they had only lost 200 people was that the 50 demons had been scattered around the encampment. It had thus earned the reinforcements some time to fight back. If the demons had planned to massacre the entire barracks while sacrificing the Senior Demon at the very beginning, the First Army would have probably sustained a much greater loss.

"A loss of 500?, 1,000... or 2,000? Of course, we'll eventually annihilate them and preserve Tower Station No. 1. However, it'll be hard to say which party would win the battle then," said Edith as she splayed her fingers. "Unfortunately, the demons are too arrogant to seize this opportunity. The first army, on the other hand, learned a lot from this operation. For example, they should now know that the barracks should be built underneath the ground; the roof should not only be able to block stone needles but also the strikes of the machine guns and mortars. If our enemy didn't make such a mistake, it would have probably cost us a lot more to learn our lesson." Edith paused for a second and then went on, "Anyway, fellows, it's just a beginning."

Chapter 1089: The Deity of Gods

It took a lot of energy and strength to connect minds.

He could only find two words to describe such a kind of feeling: burning and chaotic.

The burning sensation resulted from the Origin of Magic. Although the Origin of Magic was where all kinds of power stemmed from, what everything returned to, and also what created the Realm of Minds, it would destroy everything coming near it before its upgrade.

As for the chaotic feeling, it came from minds themselves.

Once magic power reached a certain point, it would leave marks on a person's mind.

Numerous minds converged as streams merged with the ocean. Some of them sank to the bottom, leaving the slightest trace behind them while others floated off with the tidal waves.

The difference between the two lay whether minds had consciousness.

That was what parted higher minds from lower ones.

The ones sinking to the bottom were useless, whereas the floating ones indicated that they had entered the Realm of Mind before. Even if they had just been there once, they differentiated themselves from others.

Hackzord was one of those who was good at controlling minds.

He was not only acknowledged by the Origin of Magic but also obtained the ability to connect with minds at will.

This enabled him to search for some valuable information.

But he did not do such things quite often.

Minds intertwined and influenced each other. If he stayed there

for too long, his mind would be contaminated. Besides, it was easy to get lost in the midst of wild streams of minds. Many people had indeed lost the sense of direction after they entered the Realm of Minds, leaving their soulless bodies behind in the real world. Hackzord did not want to be one of them.

The main reason, however, was that Hackzord did not like it here.

Even though he was one of the top mind controllers, he could not linger too long.

Without the support of a body, the mind would eventually sink to the Origin of Magic. Newly awakened individuals would soon replace him, as everything was subject to changes. He would eventually vanish into a puff of smoke if he did not upgrade himself. Watching his own mind dancing up and down was like watching his own life slowly draw close to its end. It was not a pleasant experience.

Suddenly, Hackzord sensed something familiar.

"Is this... Kabradhabi?"

He was surprised.

"Why is he so weak like he's dying?" he wondered.

Kabradhabi should not have been that weak even if those low lives had destroyed his body. Although his mind was now at the bottom, it was, after all, the mind of an upgraded one. As the commander of the Western Front Army, he would not lose his consciousness upon dying.

Nonetheless, the Kabradhabi in front him was way weaker than the upgraded one he knew. He was even weaker than a female insect. With such feeble magic power, Kabradhabi should have had no way to enter the Realm of Mind.

Hackzord stretched out his non-existing hands and slowly grabbed that thread of mind.

"Sky Lord," a voice said, waking him up from the Realm of Mind, "the king is summoning you."

He turned around, cast the guard a glance and said, "Noted. You may leave."

"Yes."

Hackzord let go of the legacy shard gleaming in red and zoomed toward the top of the Birth Tower.

After they inherited a part of the civilization, they made great progress in their magic power research. The invention of symbiosis had freed them from magic stones. Even the Birth Tower had developed some new abilities, such as amplifying the effect of magic power and resonating with other Birth Towers.

The resonance between different Birth Towers enabled local lords to communicate with the king directly.

The thick, wet mists surrounding the top of the tower made Hackzord feel better. He put his hand on the tower and started to concentrate his mind.

"Sky Lord is at your service, my king."

"How did the plan go?" the king's voice rang off the tower. "We don't have much time left."

"Did something happen at the Sky-sea Realm again?" Hackzord asked instantly.

"Yes, something quite wild happened there. Most people suggested ignoring it, given that the Deity of Gods is close to its completion. They maintain that once the Deity of Gods comes into use, we would be able to reverse the situation, starting to attack the enemy rather than just defending against them."

"Deity of Gods!"

Hackzord was thunderstruck.

"So, finally, they're having... the ultimate legendary weapon?"

For years, they had been striving to go beyond the restriction of mineral Magic Stones to travel around in the world at will. Now, their dream was finally coming true.

Like the name suggested, this was a God's gift. It meant that they were another step closer to the Origin of Magic.

Sky Lord expressed his admiration for the king through his mind.

"What's your thought on this?"

"Something unexpected happened at the Western Front," said Hackzord. He had wanted to tell the king that everything was fine, considering that the king had already the Sky-sea Realm to worry about. He did not want to place more burden on his shoulder. However, he should also be absolutely loyal to the king by not making any decisions for him. At this thought, he changed his mind. "My commander's report shows..." Hackzord broke off and then decided to address formally, as this was also how he used to call himself. "Those human beings changed a lot in the past 400 years, particularly in their combat methods. Our vanguards suffered a minor loss, but it won't impact our plan in general."

The king slipped into silence after hearing the report. He then asked, "Is it a result of evolution?"

"It has nothing to do with evolution but more with the usage of devices and natural elements, for example, fire that we aren't quite familiar with."

"Not even magic power?"

"I'm afraid so. My commander planned to capture some men and some of their weapons like we used to. Unfortunately, our attempt was unsuccessful," Hackzord said. "My commander suggests me sending some reinforcements to the Western Front or looking for the reason via the Realm of Mind."

"Did any upgraded ones fall in men's hands?" asked the king, who

was seemingly unimpressed. "I did expect that this would happen one day, since we've lowered the upgrading requirement, but it seems too soon to me. I remember the commander of the Western Front is the one you highly speak of, a what you called a genius. Are you sure he fulfilled his due diligence?"

Hackzord bent his head immediately.

"So, did you find anything?"

"Nothing. He barely has any magic power left, so I couldn't get many details out of him." He hesitated for a moment and then said, "But..."

"But what...?"

"When my mind touched his, I somehow saw extremely bright flames... It might just be an illusion."

"If they're really fires, then never mind," the king snapped. "Although we rarely use them, we know enough about them. Plus, we stopped learning from human beings a long time ago. As for your first request, I'll decline it for you. We should focus more on the attack at the Sky-sea Realm. I can't give you more troops and I certainly won't send you the troops who are supposed to guard our headquarters. Don't forget though, the legacy shard that determines the upgrading of our kinds is now in your custody!"

"I understand."

"Very well then. Make sure our plan goes smoothly. Once we have the Deity of Gods, we'll gain the eventual victory." The king's voice trailed off and gradually faded out of his mind.

Chapter 1090: An Unexpected Visitor

In Thorn Town at the foot of the Cage Mountain in the Kingdom of Dawn.

A wagon train passed through the town and staggered to a halt in front of the lord's mansion.

"Here we are. Get off, all of you! Hurry up!" A man who seemed to be the steward of the fleet brandished a horsewhip and bellowed, "Govern yourselves if you want to stay alive. Answer whatever the lord asks you. You got it?"

Most of the passengers getting off the carriage were pale and ragged. They were tied to each other by the wrist with a rope. Beyond a doubt, they were all slaves, slaves of the lowest rank.

Slaves were trafficked to Thorn Town quite often recently. The arrival of the Graycastle exploration team, as well as numerous caravans and emissary delegations sent by various lords gradually filled this quiet town with exuberance and vivacity. These new visitors either took up their abodes at a hotel or pitched a tent or a barrack outside the town. Within merely a month or so, this remote town had expanded a great deal.

"Sir Marl, what do you think of these people?" Forint Sheffield, one of the recent visitors from the City of Maplesong, asked Marl Tokat, a great noble in the City of Glow, greasily. His eyes were fixed on Marl, one hand massaging the other restlessly. "These people are in a good health condition, with no visible disabilities. They're the best picks from the prison. Although they look fragile, they all have ferocious characters. Once they are fed, they can do anything for you, sir."

"Enough," Marl dismissed him with a wave impatiently. From the look of Forint, Marl instantly knew this man, who shared the same family name with the lord of Maplesong, was not worth his time. "I'm not interested in purchasing prisoners, but this gentleman

here is. This is Mr. Sean, the Captain of the Imperial Guards of the King of Graycastle."

"I, I see," Forint stumbled while bowing again. "My lord immediately answered the summon of the King of Dawn. He asked me to commence my journey as soon as possible. Pray forgive me for my ignorance. I wasn't aware that Mr. Sean is the real purchaser."

"That's fine," said Sean as he walked up to the prisoners whilst darting his eyes from one another. These prisoners were apparently not as good as those sent by the King of Dawn. However, considering that they currently needed as many people as possible to excavate the Temple of the Cursed, he was not too fussy about this matter.

When Sean was carefully surveying the prisoners, one of them suddenly dashed out of the queue, knelt down in front of him and said exasperatedly, "Sir, I'm wrongfully accused. Please let me go!"

Restricted by the rope, he could only implore in a half-kneeling position

"You idiot!" The steward yelled while gritting his teeth. He would have lashed his whip at him if the two lords had not been present.

"Why did you say so?" Sean asked curiously as he stopped in front of him.

"I didn't kill or rob. I only stole some chickens from my neighbor!" the prisoner explained breathlessly. "Prisoners with such minor offenses in the City of Maplesong will be only sentenced to flogging or banishment. It isn't a capital offence, sir!"

"Is that so?" Sean asked as he turned to Forint.

Forint replied at once, "Yes and no, sir. On the day before Earl Sheffield received the summon of the King of Dawn, he made a little adjustment to the local laws. To quash the rampant Rats and reduce underground crimes, he increased the maximum penalties

for all crimes, including theft."

"Wh-what?" said the prisoner in astonishment. "A death penalty for stealing some chickens?"

"Is it very hard for you to understand?" Forint shot him a distainful look and said, "The internal war and the constant rebellions bleed off strength from the City of Maplesong. With the increase in refugees, how to make scums like you behave if not with more severe punishment? Today you steal chickens from your neighbor, tomorrow your neighbor would probably starve to death. So, what's the difference between a thief and a murderer? In my opinion, you deserve a death penalty."

"Sir, I..."

The prisoner wanted to argue, but Sean interrupted him. "Since you're guilty, what about doing some work to atone for your sin?" He paused for a second and then raised his voice. "You probably have all known that you'll get your freedom after ten years of heavy labor, no matter what crime you committed. This is a promise made by the King of Graycastle and the King of Dawn! Don't try to escape, for this is your last chance!"

With these words, he signaled his men to take away the prisoners. Forint immediately approached him with the same oily smile. "I knew you would take all of them. According to our contract, one prisoner is..."

"One gold royal each, and it's 106 in total, right?" Sean asked.

"That's right!" Forint replied, his eyes glistening with excitement.

"Someone in the lord's mansion will receive you."

"Yes, sir!" Forint said, returning Sean a broad grin.

"Also," Sean spoke abruptly as Forint turned around, "I don't want to see the same thing happen again."

"You mean..." Forint said, a little surprised.

"I don't care whether the lord of Maplesong amended the laws the day before or not, but according to our contract, the prisoners must be told the purpose of this trip and the punishment they will receive. If there's one more prisoner who appears not aware of his death sentence and claims that he's innocent, I'll have to deduct a portion of my payment," Sean warned sternly.

He neither intended to be some sort of judge, nor did he really have empathy for these people. For him, the most important thing was to complete Roland's task and prevent those avarious noble merchants from disgracing his Majesty.

"I... I see." Forint said while bowing his head. "I'll be more careful next time."

After Forint took his leave, Marl commented with a shrug, "You're very cautious."

"I'm just doing my due diligence."

"Really?" said Marl as he looked at the crowded town. "Your king even takes extra caution when purchasing death row prisoners. I wonder if King Wimbledon did it on purpose or he's simply a born philanthropist. My elder brother told me that he's around the same age as me, but he's already a marvelous king. A man can't be a philanthropist and king at the same time. Now I really want to meet him in person, since his guard has already impressed me."

"It isn't hard to meet the King of Graycastle since you're from one of the three big noble families," said Sean coldly. "If I were you, I would not be so imprudent as to say such things to that guard."

"Who cares? You tend to shut yourself in instead of sharing your thoughts with others, don't you?" Marl said while spreading out his hands.

Sean now had a better understanding of Marl's character. Like his cordial, loyal brother Otto Tokat, as the second son of the Tokat Family, Marl was also very easygoing.

The best way to deal with this kind of person was to ignore him.

He turned around, planning to take a look at the dump site guarded by the First Army when a soldier sprinted up to him.

"Sir, a stranger wants to see you. He says he knows where the 'treasure' is."

Sean drew his brows together. Ever since the message of searching for the cursed treasure went out, every now and then they had people coming forward who claimed that they knew the whereabouts of the treasure, most of whom were scammers who provided false information just for the purpose of getting a reward. Sean said, "Didn't I tell you that you only report to me when there's a solid clue?"

"That guy insists on meeting you in person," the soldier replied. "He claims to be one of the last survivors from Hermes. Apart from the treasure, he also knows where the remaining members of the church are hiding. We've already detained him."

"Hermes... church?"

Sean squinted his eyes and then said, "Got it. I'll go meet him."

Chapter 1091: Hopeless Love

Sean was studying the man tied to a chair in a tent. The latter did not avert his eyes. He was also gazing at Sean in silence.

It was unusual for a traitor to be so quiet. Back in the old king's city, Sean had witnessed numerous betrayals. Although traitors tipped him useful information, Sean despised the worst of human nature portrayed by a traitor: avarice, obsequiousness and power-hunger.

The reaction of this man, however, raised Sean's interest.

After the two men stared at each other for quite a while, Sean broke the silence. "Name?"

"Joe," the man answered. "Are you the commander here? I mean the commander of the Graycastle troop rather than the lord of Thorn Town or some other random lord."

"Is that important to you?"

"If you aren't, I won't spit a word, because... there's no point of doing that."

"This sounds quite interesting," thought Sean.

Sean leaned forward a little a bit and said, "I'm the Chief Guard of the King of Graycastle, King Roland Wimbledon, and also the captain of the Graycastle exploration team. You can call me Sean. I'm the person whom you can put confidence in. Now, can you tell me the whereabouts of the treasure?"

"You must be looking for the Magic Ceremony Cube in the Temple of the Cursed at the Cage Mountain," Joe replied flatly. "The Earl of Archduke Island Lorenzo has it!"

Sean was a little surprised at his bluntness. He had thought the man would negotiate with him before providing some vague clues that required him to verify their validity, but the man immediately

told him everything. Sean asked, "Have you... seen it before?"

"No, but it isn't a secret in the church." Joe then briefly related the war between the church and the Kingdom of Wolfheart. He said, "Lorenzo bragged about his discovery and exaggerated the Cube a lot in his report. Many church executives knew about it, but the Holy City of Hermes didn't pay it much attention."

"I see. So the treasure was in the Kingdom of Wolfheart before being captured by the church. Fair enough," Sean muttered as he stroked his chin. "But why did you tell me this? You can also sell the information to some other lords, can't you?"

Joe took a deep breath and said, "Sir, have you heard of... the God's Punishment Army?"

"Naturally. It's the secret army the church took pride in," said Sean derisively. "Unfortunately, however, it was flattened by His Majesty's First Army during the battle at Coldwind Ridge."

"Very well then," said Joe, who did not seem to be remotely upset about his response. "It would be easier for me to make it clear outright. As Lorenzo has a group of God's Punishment Army, nobody dares challenge his authority over the Archduke Island except the King of Graycastle."

"So?" The guard said while raising his brows. "I thought those man slaughter machines were all killed in action at Coldwind Ridge. How many of them are left?"

"Ten... no, probably around five," said Joe hesitantly. "Anyway, it's not a lot."

"Five would be enough to guard a castle," said Sean with a smile. "What do you want from me then? Or how much would you like me to pay you for this piece of information?"

"No, my only hope is to stay alive," Joe said in a hushed voice. "The church has nothing to compete against Graycastle now, but Lorenzo is still planning to revenge the church. His men have

already entered Thorn Town, and I don't want to meddle in this matter. If..." He broke off and then continued, "If this information is helpful to you, I hope the King of Graycastle could acquit me."

Sean doubted whether this was his real motive.

Sean rested his chin on his hand, a gesture King Roland often made when he interrogated prisoners. Although Sean did not possess a special ability to distinguish lies from truths like Ms. Nightingale did, sometimes he did not necessarily need magic power to do so.

To be honest, he did not perceive any signs that indicated this man named Joe had a strong desire to live. When he stared into his eyes, he could see a hint of stone cold self-determination in them.

Perhaps Joe did not realize that he was wearing a look of a desperate man.

"Just this one request?"

"Y-yes."

"Then I'll ask someone to escort you to Neverwinter."

"Huh?" Joe said, noticing something wrong. "Why do I have to go to Neverwinter?"

Sean rose to his feet and said, "I don't have the power to acquit you, but I can't abandon a person who retracts from a wrong path. Don't worry, everybody in Graycastle knows His Majesty is a benevolent and honorable man. The Witch Union can also double check the reliability of your testimony. If you didn't lie, you would be treated fairly and certainly be exonerated from your wrongdoings. If with luck, you'll probably even receive a large sum of rewards for coming forward."

"S-sir... that treasure..." Joe stammered, attempting to stand up but the rope restricted his movement.

"If Earl Lorenzo does have the treasure, His Majesty will get it

from him sooner or later. Besides, you have nothing to do with the treasure, right?" Sean said while spreading out his hands. "No need to worry. Although Neverwinter is far and we can't set you free for the time being before confirming the validity of your information, we'll pay you for sure. The church will no longer pose a threat to you." With these words, Sean turned to a soldier and instructed, "Send him back to his cell."

"No, sir, hang on..." Joe said. His expression changed. The previous indifference yielded to a panic and defenseless look. He struggled to stand up, threw himself abruptly to the floor and said, "Please, don't send me to Neverwinter!"

His feign nonchalance dissolved into a look of forlorn despair as his voice rose. Sean stopped. He did not understand why this man would suddenly sink into such a state of despondency when he was already prepared to die.

"Why?" Sean asked as he wheeled around. "Or rather, you actually wanted something else?"

"Please, please save her — save Farrina, please!" Joe implored, banging his head to the floor as he kept yelling hysterically. "She doesn't have much time. She... she doesn't have much time left..."

His voice, in the end, trailed off into a sob.

"That's probably his real intention," thought Sean.

He walked up to Joe who trembled uncontrollably, patted him on the shoulder and asked, "Who's Farrina? Why doesn't she have much time? Now I really need to have a good chat with you."

...

After Joe restored his composure, he related everything to Sean. At this point, Sean understood what had happened.

It was actually a story about love.

Joe was indeed the last remaining church member, whereas the

former bishop had become his enemy. With no other alternatives, Joe thus turned to the former opponent of the church, the First Army from Graycastle, for help. Compared with external rivals, traitors were always more despicable. Meanwhile, Sean also learned why Joe was ready to die: he knew from the beginning that the First Army would eventually see through his plan and believed it would be better to be hanged and die together with Farrina together than being tortured by Lorenzo.

Joe could have taken things slow. However, considering Farrina might not survive Lorenzo's endless torture, he decided to risk his life to come to seek First Army instead of waiting for another few months. He knew Lorenzo would not kill Farrina immediately, as he still needed her for getting the Holy Book. Yet Farrina definitely could not wait for that long. After all, human bodies had a limit. By the time Graycastle took action half a year later, it might be too late.

At first, Sean did not want to meddle in the internal conflict of the church. He was also suspicious of the validity of Joe's information. However, after learning that this was all about love, Sean believed Joe.

The next thing Sean needed to do was to find the men sent by Earl Lorenzo to further confirm the news.

"I see. Once I catch those people, I'll let His Majesty know at once," Sean promised slowly. "I'll send him a message via carrier pigeon."

Chapter 1092: An Arrest Warrant

...

"So, you're going to help him?" said Marl Tokat as he knitted his brows. "To help a remnant church member?"

After Sean sent Joe away, he immediately sent for the emissary of the City of Glow and told him the whole story. He did not believe the three noble families would try to keep the treasure for themselves, because none of them knew what it was used for. If the treasure was really something extremely powerful, they should not have had it smuggled out of the Kingdom of Dawn in the first place.

"I don't make the call as to whether I should help him or not," said Sean indifferently. "My instruction is to find the treasure as soon as possible. Now, I've finally obtained a clue that sounds reliable, so naturally I should further confirm its credibility. As for what comes next, I'll leave it to His Majesty." He paused for a moment, rested his eyes on Marl and asked, "So, do you have any good plans, Mr. Emissary?"

The First Army was invincible, but their unparalleled power would be of no use if there was not an enemy to compete with. Since the First Army did not have expertise in searching for cunning spies, it would be better to place the matter in the three noble families' hands.

"To be completely honest, I wish I had never listened to this story," Marl said, shrugging. "Lady Quinn was expelled from the Kingdom of Dawn because of the church. If there were no church, she would probably have married my brother now... Ahem, but since you've asked, I'll try my best to assist you. Although there have been many visitors to the town recently, it shouldn't be that hard to find a particular group of people."

"A particular group of people?"

"Yes, as the passage to the Cage Mountain is blocked, the fastest way to get here from the Kingdom of Wolfheart is via sea. People have to go through Coral Bay, a port city in the northeast of Thorn Town," Marl replied as he counted on his fingers. "We are going to look for fleets coming from the east, with around 10 to 15 crew members, probably with a little Wolfheart accent, and dressed up like Wolfheart citizens. Based on these criteria, we'll be able to narrow our target down to only several fleets. I reckon there are less than five that meet all these criteria."

"Is this because Coral Bay... is the only big city in the east? Once we circle out these people, are we going to detain and interrogate them all?" Sean asked thoughtfully. The situation was pretty similar to that in Neverwinter. Many people came to Neverwinter from the east but none the west, except the demons. "

"That's right," Marl answered with a nod. "The spy you're looking for is very likely among them."

"But who should do all this work?"

"Is there anyone else who knows better than the town than the local Rats? A problem that can be solved with money isn't really a problem," Marl replied smilingly as he placed his hand on his chest. "To show the sincerity of the three families, the Tokats is willing to bear all the expenses incurred."

...

In a residential house in the suburb of Thorn Town, the butler of the Earl of the Archduke Island, Hagrid, was fanning impatiently, trying to keep the buzzing mosquitos away from him.

"What an awful place this is! There's not even a mosquito net here," thought Hagrid irritably. How was he supposed to live here two months later when summer started?

Hagrid still had no clue as to why the Magic Ceremony Cube illuminated.

He was not even sure whether the King of Graycastle was really coming for the treasure in the Temple of the Cursed.

"Maybe I should go and see what he is doing at the moment?" Hagrid thought.

Based on the information collected by his men, the Graycastle Exploration Team had arrived at Thorn Town two months ago. It appeared that they were planning something extraordinary. First, they had built a road in the mountain. Then, they had started to recruit death row prisoners. They had also turned the temple on the mountainside inside out. Every day, they shipped bricks and stones from the mountain and piled them up in an open field constantly guarded by the soldiers.

It made perfect sense if they excavated the ground to search for the hidden treasure. However, Graycastle seemed to be more enthusiastic for stones than the treasure itself. Hagrid had once watched them work from a distance. He had seen the soldiers air slabs and bricks in the sun before shipping them to Coral Bay in the east via carriage.

Hagrid did not understand what the King of Graycastle used these black stones for.

He had also managed to obtain some of the stones from the port and asked his men to send them to Earl Lorenzo. As he had expected, the stones did not help the Magic Ceremony Cube recover its legendary power.

The key to activating this ancient treasure must be something else.

"Sir, the person you're looking for is here," reported a man who lifted the curtain and came in.

"Send him in," Hagrid said as he straightened up and turned up the collar of his coat.

"Yes, sir!"

A villager-looking man was pushed in. He knelt down on the floor, looked up at Hagrid gingerly and said, "Sir, my name is Knaff. Do you want to climb up the mountain? As long as you don't intend to cross the mountain, I can take you anywhere you want..."

"You were the guide for the Graycastle men when they arrived at the Cage Mountain?" Hagrid talked over him.

"Y-yes... sir."

...

Hagrid tossed him a small pouch and said, "Here's 20 gold royals. If you can give me information that would interest me, they'll be yours."

"Of, of course, sir. I'll tell you everything I know!" Knaff said hotly.

"Tell me what happened in detail. I want to know everything," said Hagrid as he swept the villager with a disdainful look and reclined against his armchair.

When Hagrid heard the exploration team climb up the Cage Mountain, his eyes snapped open. He asked, "Hang on, what did you just say?"

"The witch called Azima —"

"No, after that!"

"Um, she said, 'this way', with a coin in her hand."

"A coin?" Hagrid pursued. "What does it look like?"

"It looks pretty plain, neither like a silver royal nor a bronze royal," Knaff replied after a moment of contemplation. "Right, the coin isn't patterned. It seems to be a thin slice of polished metal."

"Was the witch holding it all the time?" Hagrid asked, having a vague feeling that this was probably the key.

"Most of the time she was," The guide answered with a look of

dawning comprehension. "Now I remember that this group of people followed the witch. Every time they took a turn, the witch would place the coin in front of her and gaze at it for a while."

"Damn it! So it does have something to do with witches!"

Hagrid clenched his fist and asked, "Where's that witch... called Azima?"

"I, I don't know," Knaff said while shaking his head vigorously. "She left Thorn Town immediately. Perhaps... she returned to Graycastle?"

If the witch had stayed at Thorn Town for only a few days, then she must have departed the Cage Mountain before he had left the Archduke Island. However, The Magic Ceremony Cube had been illuminating since his departure, which meant... she had left the coin here. Hagrid resolved a multitude of thoughts in his mind. He came to realize that this particular coin was probably a "key" discovered by the King of Graycastle from the ruins. Since it was so important, he speculated that it must be in the custody of the leader of the Exploration Team.

Hagrid had learned who the leaders of the Exploration Team were a long time ago. The personnels of the highest rank of the exploration team were the commander-in-chief, Sean, and the emissary of the three families, Marl.

He thought the king's guard might be easier to deal with compared to the second son of the Tokat family. Like the old saying went, fortresses always crumbled from within.

How many gold royals did he have to prepare in order to pry open the guard's mouth?

500... or 1,000?

Hagrid knew Earl Lorenzo would pay whatever it required to know the secret of the Magic Cube.

Once he managed to touch base with that commander, he would

soon be able to learn the answer.

Hagrid was thrilled by his plan.

If he could get the "key" to the treasure, Earl Lorenzo would definitely rely on his counsels more. Perhaps one day, he would even become a lord. After all, anyone could use the Magic Cube. It did not have to be a lord necessarily.

While he was fantasizing about his bright future, there was a pattering of running feet outside the door.

"Wait a minute, who are you —"

"Aargh!"

With clinks and clanks, the door was forced open. Before Hagrid realized it, a group of patroller-like men rushed into his room and prostrated him to the floor.

Hagrid yelled, struggling, "I, I'm a law-abiding merchant. You can't do this to me! I can offer you as much money as you want —"

"The lord of Thorn Town suspects that some church dregs are hiding among your crews. We request your full cooperation with our investigation at once!" The men said firmly. "Save all the talk for his lordship!"

Chapter 1093: To the New World

"Twin Dragon Island hasn't been so bustling for a while."

Thunder said as he stood at the top of the bridge of the "Snow Wind", watching the boisterous dock down below.

Thousands of people were congregated here, busy loading their ships. From above, they looked like ants moving in a line. The dock area was filled with the yellings of vendors, the shoutings of sailors, as well as the sound of tidal waves foaming on the beach. All these sounds preluded their upcoming journey.

The other side of the dock was packed with sailing ships, their masts soaring into the air, forming a sea that stretched away endlessly.

Thousands of banners and flags streamed in the air, including those of Crescent Moon Bay, Sunset Island and Shallow Water Town. All the influential Chambers of Commerce at the Fjords had gathered here, ready to commence their voyages.

The last time Thunder had attended a big event of this scale was when he had reached 22 years old, when all the Chambers of Commerce had assembled to explore Shadow Waters.

Margaret said smilingly, "Not only Twin Dragon Island but also the entire Fjords are exhilarated by your news. A route that used to be the least profitable has now become the most popular one. The newborn generation is really lucky. They don't have to risk their lives to become real explorers."

Thunder curled up his lips into a smile.

He knew Margaret was talking about the route leading to the Festive Harbor.

When the news that "as long as you find something interesting at the Endless Cape, you can claim rewards from the King of Graycastle" spread to the Fjords, the explorer community was

stirred.

Fjords people had a crazy obsession with the title "explorer", for the title represented fame and wealth. However, it was not easy to discover a new sailing route, a new island or a big secret without a large amount of money, and more often than not an attempt would end up being fruitless and might even cost their lives.

Yet the recruitment campaign held by the King of Graycastle had altered everything. He had opened a very well-developed and relatively safe route between the Fjords and the Endless Cape. The brand new port city, the City of Festive, brought huge business opportunities. Even if one did not make any new discoveries, he would at least be able to profit something from this trip.

If one, with a stroke of luck, did find something invaluable, it would be even better.

Plus, the King of Graycastle made it very clear that those ancient ruins might bear a significant relationship to a secret with respect to Three Gods. Anyone who contributed to the revelation of the secret would have a chance to be titled "Honorary Lifetime Explorer" by the king. Although Graycastle, as a kingdom on the continent, employed a different system from the Fjord Islands, this condition for a lifetime explorer was fairly reasonable. As a matter of fact, Fjords people took this requirement more seriously than Graycastle citizens.

After all, the exploration had something to do with their faith in Three Gods.

As the new route was so lucrative, it inevitably raised some suspicions among a few explorers. These skeptical voices, however, were soon drowned out by enthusiastic merchants. The name of the King of Graycastle had spread throughout the whole Fjords market when Chaos Drinks and perfumes had been introduced to the islands. With the democratization of Graycastle commodities at the Fjords and a wide use of paddle steamers, more and more

Fjords people started to include Roland Wimbledon in their daily conversations. A stereotype gradually formed among Fjords residents that Neverwinter citizens were all ultra-rich people.

Meanwhile, the foundation of the Joint Chamber of Commerce further strengthened people's faith in Roland Wimbledon.

Since their employer was a powerful king, it made sense that he set up a relatively high threshold for people to receive that honorable title.

Hearing the news, almost everyone at the Fjords started to take action. There were generally two groups of people. The more experienced and adventurous ones joined Thunder, whereas the others who preferred a safe journey while hoping to make a good fortune out of the trip headed to the Endless Cape, attempting to find themselves a good spot at the Festive Harbor.

Thunder would have never believed a country across the channel could exert such a huge impact on the Fjords if he had not witnessed it himself.

This drastic change had only taken place in the past one or two years.

Thunder said to Margaret as he squinted at the distant horizon that looked like a thin thread of silver, "Thanks to your help. I couldn't have been dedicated to the exploration if you didn't take care of the Chamber of Commerce for me. If truth be told, I'm good at nothing but taking adventures. I'm not even a good father. You have helped me so much over the past few years..."

"You should know that I'm most willing to do these things for you," Margaret answered as she put her hand on the back of Thunder's. "Doesn't it hurt one's feelings to appreciate a person who doesn't want anything in return? We're going on a long trip soon. It's better not to talk about things like this."

"Margaret..." Thunder said. He turned around and their eyes

met.

"Having said that, it isn't exactly accurate to say that I ask for nothing. There's something... that I do want," said Margaret as she winked. "So just bear in mind that I am up to something, and please don't feel that you owe me."

Thunder knew what Margaret wanted.

He was glad to see Lightning and her get along well back in Neverwinter.

Now he suddenly realized that he had been accustomed to Margaret's company.

It was weird that a man like him, who could steer his ship against whirling hurricanes and waves, would feel a little hesitant to confess his feelings.

Thunder was debating whether he should hold Margaret's hand when his first mate interrupted their conversation.

"Captain — " The first mate craned his neck, yelling on the terrace of the bridge. "All the caravans are waiting for your instruction!"

Thunder coughed and said, "Got it! I'm coming!"

"Alrighty!"

He then took a deep breath, turned to Margaret and said, "Time to go."

"Off you go." Margaret smiled at him while nodding. "Do what you're best at, as His Majesty said..."

"Right," Thunder said, "... to the new world."

...

He walked down the tower, passed the bridge, crossed the deck and reached the bow, facing the spectators gathering about at the dock.

The crowd below immediately burst into loud cheers.

Thunder waved his hand and said, "I think everybody has known that the farthest we have been to is Shadow Waters. However, this was just a tiny step we made in the past. There's a huge Swirling Sea out there for us to explore. This time, we're going beyond Shadow Waters, crossing the incredible Sealine and visiting the distant land in the east — a bleak emptiness not yet imprinted with human feet!"

"I've seen a vast continent in the Shadow Ruins. It's a land as splendid as the Four Kingdoms. But where is it? Is it to the east of the Sealine? We're now going to find the answers to these exciting questions. If it does exist, Fjords people would no longer need to struggle on this overcrowded land and live in fear! Also, this new land will probably bring us much more wealth than all the fortunes we have made over the past years altogether. This is also one of the reasons I encourage every capable man to join us: It's so lucrative a business that everybody would have a chance to benefit from it!"

His speech was interrupted by a rush of cheers from the crowd. Thunder waited for the crowd to fall silent again and then continued, "Yet I want something else other than gold royals and fame, that is, I want the Fjords to constitute a part of our history! Up to now, Fjords people are seldom mentioned in the history of the Four Kingdoms. There are neither prominent families dwelling on the Fjords for generations nor a king governing the land. We're far apart from the continent, living on an isolated island with no influences whatsoever on people across the channel, except for traveling caravans."

"But this will all change soon. When we discover a brand new land for mankind, history will remember us. We'll be remembered as the most adventurous explorers in the world! I hope you understand that this upcoming trip will not only alter the present but also determine our future!"

"Hoist the sails, lads!" Thunder threw his arm in the air and shouted, "To the new world!"

The crowd below also raised their arms and shouted together. Their tumultuous cheers whipped through the air.

"To the new world — full speed ahead!"

Chapter 1094: A Power of Attorney

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

Roland was sitting behind his desk answering a phone call from the front at Fertile Plains.

The word "front" was not actually accurate. Based on the decreasing rate of the reception, it was more a phone call between Neverwinter and the Longsong Stronghold than one between Neverwinter and the front. Without an extender, this was the farthest a wind-up telephone could reach.

Yet they could still go beyond this limit.

The simplest way was to ask Leaf to "forward" calls. When she turned into the Heart of Forest, she could control the entire Misty Forest with her mind and transfer information even faster than Lightning when she was flying at the speed of sound. The front personnel simply needed to call Leaf, who would then transfer the call to Roland. In that case, they could pretty much receive messages instantly.

"Everything looks fine for now," Leaf replied in an unnecessarily low tone to mimic Iron Axe. "As you anticipated, the demons made several attempts to destroy the railway tracks afterwards, but their action didn't really impact our logistics. Without the spider demons, they could only move the tracks manually. Moreover, they had to hurry off to avoid a direct clash with the 'Blackriver'. Since there was no need to replace the entire railway, it didn't take our engineer team long to mend the damaged section."

"It seems that the armored trains worked."

"Yes, Your Majesty. The armored trains actually function as a small stronghold. They play an important role in sending reinforcements and repairing the railway. I just wish there were more of them. If we could put a "Blackriver" at every station, that

would be great."

"You make it sound like an easy job." Roland could not resist grinning over the phone. "Apart from armored trains, we also need witches to continue to produce freight trains. The two we have now is the best we can do at present. Keep expanding our defensive line. Hopefully we can get prepared for the general offensive by midsummer."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Leaf said in a muffled voice.

"Leaf, you can actually... skip the nasal sound," Roland thought in amusement.

Roland continued on a cough, "By the way, is there still no sign of a massive attack from the demons yet?"

He had been quite restless since Nightingale had woken him up in the middle of that night, telling him that the First Army had encountered a night raid. His heart had been in his throat until Anna told him that the loss was moderate and that Edith had reassured everything was fine.

In fact, poor lighting had always been a big problem for the First Army. In a dark surrounding, their firing rate would be significantly compromised, and Roland had still not figured out how to manufacture tracers. The soldiers essentially had to rely on the witches' instructions to fire. Roland had not expected the demons would launch their first voluntary attack at night. He was surprised to learn that they had not only developed a thorough understanding of the ability of Sylvie's Magic Eye but also grasped the nature of firearms. He was also quite taken aback at the fact that they adopted a loose formation and sneaked in. Fortunately, the enemy did not possess a weapon as powerful as a cannon, and the First Army had carried out their contingency plan perfectly. Otherwise, the outcome of the battle could have been different.

"I haven't noticed any signs that indicate the demons will attack us at night like last time so far," Leaf said. "Ms. Sylvie is now putting one or two hours every day on patrolling the railway area which the demons must pass if they plan to attack us. She sometimes also spies on the enemy on the Magic Ark or the 'Seagull'. At least, it's safe for now."

"What does the General Staff say about it?"

"They think there are two possible reasons. One is that the demons have noticed our change and can't play their old trick anymore. The other is that the demons can't assemble enough troops to have a second round of attack in such a short time."

"Really?" said Roland thoughtfully. Apart from the demons' remarkable learning ability, he was also very concerned about that Senior Demon acting as the skirmisher.

Indeed, this was not their first time meeting a Senior Demon.

Now he remembered after they had met the first Senior Demon at the snow mountain, they had encountered this particular type of Senior Demon four times. However, several hundreds of years ago, Senior Demons used to be commanders only. The Union would only have had a chance to kill them after the Blessed Army had slain all other regular demons. They had apparently lost their superior status over the past hundreds of years and started to participate in a battle more often than they used to. This was definitely not good news for them.

For the soulless God's Punishment Army, Roland could still develop some specific tactics to tackle them. For a group of Senior Demons with various powers, he could literally do nothing about them but to cross his fingers.

Since there were no particular methods to fight the Senior Demons off, the only way Roland could think of now was a universal strategy, which was to catch the enemy unprepared and eradicate them with more powerful gunfire.

"The demons would definitely not allow us to prowl around the Fertile Plains. We should stay alert, making sure we leave them no chance."

"Noted!" Leaf said while raising her voice. After the communication was over, she said with an abrupt return to her usual manner, "Your Majesty, Iron Axe has hung up."

"Alright..." Roland heaved a sigh and asked, "Who's next?"

"The Minister of Construction, Karl Van Bate."

Roland was a bit surprised to hear the Ministry of Construction have problems, as they had already sufficient materials and manpower to carry out their projects. He thus said, "Transfer the call."

"Your Majesty," Leaf said whilst mimicking Carl's voice this time. Although Roland could still somehow distinguish the difference, the rustling of the twigs and leaves made Leaf's performance quite impressive. "The construction team has encountered some problems recently. I hope the other departments of the Administrative Office could help us."

"It seems... Leaf has got addicted to this voice over job," Roland thought.

The report from the Minister of Construction was fairly straightforward. The night raid had shocked many workers and resulted in a low morale among the workers. As many foremen had noticed their workers were slacking off, they wished to change the workers' shifts or allow their families to visit them so as to raise their spirits.

Roland thought it was practically impossible to change everybody's shifts since not all the workers were willing to trade their lives for a higher pay. As such, he steered the conversation to the second method. "Family visits? I remember more than 70% of the railway workers are immigrants who don't have a family. If we

allow family visits, those who don't have relatives would feel bitter against those who do, which would then exacerbate the current situation," Roland replied.

"I've thought about that, Your Majesty," Leaf answered for the Minister. "The railway construction team once asked all the workers to submit a Power of Attorney, in which they named the person who will have the full authority to take care of their personal matters in case they're killed in action. This person must be very important to that worker and thus, in a sense, can be regarded as his family member."

"That sounds like a plan," Roland said after a moment of reflection. "Alright then. I'll ask Barov to arrange it."

Chapter 1095: An Account of the Past

After Roland hung up, Nightingale placed a silver white ring on his desk.

It was a ring made of two shards of aluminum that could hold a roll of paper as small as a person's palm specifically designed for carrier pigeons. The combination of the ring and Soraya's "ultra-thin paper" enabled them to deliver more messages at a time. Instead of tying notes to the messengers' claws, they could now simply attach them to this ring.

To prevent accidents en route, each local Administrative Office set up a post station for messengers who flew over 500 kilometers to take a rest before taking off for the next station. To more efficiently sort encrypted mail, the ring was embossed with an identification code similar to train tickets in modern society. The identification code would instantly tell mailmen where this encrypted letter came from and where it should go.

The letter C on this ring represented the Kingdom of Dawn. Out of security and confidentiality concerns, Roland had decided to use the first letter of each country's Pinyin spelling instead of the standard characters commonly used in the Four Kingdoms.

"Is it from Thorn Town in the Kingdom of Dawn?" Roland said while raising his eyebrows. "When did you receive it?"

"Just ten minutes ago when Honey came," Nightingale replied. "But you were on the phone at that time, so I didn't give it to you straight away."

"Did they find something new in the ruins at the Cage Mountain?" Roland wondered as he unclipped the ring and unfolded the letter.

The letter was a bit long. It took him around seven minutes to figure out what the guard was trying to convey.

"I didn't expect the church would ask for Graycastle's help," Roland remarked impressively after he put down the letter. He knew it was now impossible for the church to stage a comeback after they had abandoned Hermes, but it did not hurt to help them weed out a local noble. It was very ironic to see the very person who gave these fugitives a fatal blow was nobody but a former bishop of the church.

"Do you know where those church dregs are? Those who fled Holy City, leaving the orphans in the monastery behind?" Nightingale asked, her voice alive with curiosity.

"If what the letter says is correct, the church is now completely over," Roland said as he handed the letter to Nightingale. "Their last hope turns out to be their last straw."

Nightingale cast Roland a glance after she read the letter and asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Since the butler of the Earl of Archduke Island has confessed everything and we've also known where the treasure is, we'll sooner or later send our men to the Kingdom of Wolfheart," Roland said while tapping the desk gently. "The reaction of the Magic Ceremony Cube to the enriched uranium sample indicates the drawings on the mural are probably depictions of true stories. Regardless of what it is used for, we'd better bring the Cube back to Neverwinter. As for the acting pope Farrina..." Roland paused for a second and then went on, "Bring Joe and her back here for further questioning."

"That's what I thought you would say," Nightingale commented with a faint smile.

"I thought you wouldn't like my answer," Roland said carefully. "The church persecuted you before."

"I did hate the church very much, and I even hated men at one point," Nightingale admitted. "However, after I learned that it was actually Alice's plan and that what she did was all for the

continuity of the human race, I changed my mind. I don't hate her anymore but just feel she's pathetic. Plus, the church established by Starfall City is long gone. Even if I want to avenge myself, there's nobody for me to take revenge on now."

"Um... you hated men before?" Roland asked in surprise.

"Why do you sound so flustered?" Nightingale said as she shot him a stare. "I couldn't control my awakening. I didn't do anything wrong. Why did everybody hate me so much like I'm a horrible disease? You alienate me, so why do I have to befriend you. That's how I viewed things back then, and I can assure you that most of the witches had the same feeling before."

"Is that the reason you showed up in my bedroom with a dagger at that time?"

"You were lucky you know?" Nightingale said with a laugh. "I didn't necessarily hate people, but I did despise nobles. I sat down and negotiated with you purely because of Anna. Did you forget what people called me before?"

"No, I didn't. You were the Shadow Killer, a ghost assassin who made all the nobles in the old king's city shudder." Roland left his words unsaid.

"So you flirted with me..."

"To reveal your true nature," Nightingale said, muffling her snigger. "I was acting. I wanted to let Anna understand what disgusting creatures nobles were. Unfortunately..."

"What are you regretting about? Are you regretting that you failed to persuade Anna to leave Border Town or about your unsuccessful flirting strategy?" Roland grumbled within himself. He said glumly, "So I was indeed lucky."

"It's easy to go extreme when holding a grudge against someone," Nightingale said, justifying her behavior as she patted Roland on the shoulder. "Soon I found you're as different from the other

nobles as me, so I decided to trust you."

"Shall I say thank you?"

"You're welcome," Nightingale replied matter-of-factly. "After I learned about the Pure Witches and someone like Zero, I soon put those childish ideas behind."

"Really... you did come a long way," Roland commented with a sigh.

"Why do I have the impression that you aren't very happy?" Nightingale asked as she leaned forward and peered down at Roland, her hair touching his cheek. "You weren't very sad a while ago, but you are... now."

With these words, she quickly slid into the Mist. By the time Roland saw Nightingale again, she was lying on a recliner with a piece of dried fish between her lips, winking at him triumphantly.

Grinding his teeth, Roland got to his feet. He was about to give her a lesson, making her understand who the real King of Graycastle was, when the telephone rang.

It was from the Director of the Administrative Office.

Roland shot Nightingale a "wait-for-me" look and picked up the phone.

"Your Majesty," Barov's voice sounded over the phone, "there's a special guest from the old king's city who insists on speaking to you."

Barov, as the Hand of the King, normally did not introduce visitors himself. Intrigued, Roland asked, "Who's that?"

"The great dramatist, Sir Kajen Fels," Barov boomed, a hint of excitement in his voice.

Roland's brows were furrowed. "Why is he here again? Didn't I make it very clear in my last letter?" thought Roland a bit irritably. He replied, "I have a lot on my plate. If he doesn't have anything

really important..."

"Yes, he does, Your Majesty!" said Barov, who immediately related the purpose of Kajen's visit to Roland.

"Are you sure?" Roland said, slightly surprised.

"Yes, he truly said so!" The governor answered positively.

Hearing these words, Roland suddenly had an idea. After a moment of silence, he changed his mind and said, "Take him to the castle parlor. I'll meet him there."

Chapter 1096: His Expertise

It was Roland's first time meeting this preeminent actor and screenwriter, his hair half gray, his face half hidden in his bushy and tangled beards, his black tuxedo crisp, and his tie neatly around his neck. Like a man from a portrait, he looked old-fashioned and antiquated.

Roland pictured his portrait hung on a wall, with a caption underneath.

Although Kajen was an elderly man, his eyes had not yet aged. After a bow, the screenwriter directly rested his eyes on Roland. Apparently, it was not his first time having an encounter with a royal family member.

"Your Majesty, this is Sir Kajen Fels," Barov introduced the man while massaging his hands in exuberance. "He's the best actor and screenwriter in Graycastle and is also very well known across the Four Kingdoms. Back in the old king's city, I was a frequent visitor to the Central Theater and I liked Mr. Kajen's work very much."

"You act like a child... You're the Hand of the King. Can't you behave more like an adult?" thought Roland while twitching his lips

"Good morning, Your Majesty," said Kajen as he clapped his hand over his chest. "Now I know why you don't watch new plays."

"Really?" Roland seated himself in the host chair and said, "Why?"

"You're... too young," Kajen replied slowly. "You're much younger than I thought."

"Are you saying that a person who doesn't have a great deal of experience of life doesn't have the capability to understand your plays?" Roland would have been a little affronted at such imprudent comments if he had still been the lord of Border Town.

However, as he grew older, he became more unflappable in such a situation.

But his tone, which dropped dramatically at Kajen's words, clearly indicated that he was not very pleased.

Barov shot Kajen a warning look.

"No, Your Majesty. I'm not referring to your age but your spirit," Kajen explained while shaking his head. "Youth has nothing to do with a person's age. I've seen many nobles who live like old men in their prime. Likewise, a man who has crept in his decrepitude doesn't necessarily mean he's old." His smile became a little self-mocking at this point. "I thought I was very young, but now I realize life doesn't have a limit."

"Can I take your words as a compliment?" Roland said as he raised his brows.

"We can't say a young spirit is good and an old spirit bad, Your Majesty." To Roland's surprise, Kajen did not answer his question directly but went on, "A person with a young spirit can be motivated, audacious, curious, and the list goes on. However, he may also lose himself or even bring upon himself swift destruction while pursuing his goal, so..."

"Ahem, Mr. Kajen —" Barov interrupted him in a low voice.

"Ah, sorry, please don't take my words too seriously," said the dramatist, who had just realized he had spoken more than he was allowed to. "I'm an old man who has seen a lot of things, so I often have some crazy ideas. Please forgive my impertinence."

"That's fine," said Roland, who waved his hand and started to take a liking to Kajen. "Let's get down to the business. Barov told me that you want to work on my plays or join the Star Flower Troupe. Why's that?"

Kajen replied straight away, "I want to know more about the Magic Movie."

"So he's trying to achieve his goal in a roundabout way after I turned him down," thought Roland.

"You don't mind working on plays you disdain?"

"I'm not saying those plays aren't good..." Kajen explained. "I just feel that each show should be well planned beforehand so that actors can learn from it. Otherwise, they not only waste their time and talent but also fail their audience."

"But your audience isn't nobles, and I don't have much time for rehearsals. If you join the Star Flower Troupe, very likely you'll be forced to act in a play that doesn't meet your standards, and your name would potentially be ruined. Did you still want to join us?"

"Your Majesty, I..."

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to join the Star Flower Troupe," Roland talked over him. "The plays I plan to put on show are all meant to entertain the masses. Most of the actors will be from the Star Flower Troupe. I'm afraid I don't have any plays at the moment that will suit your taste or reflect your talent."

This time, Barov started to eye Roland.

"However..." Roland ignored Barov's meaningful blink and said, "I have something else for you."

"Yes, please," Kajen said eagerly as he leaned forward.

"In fact, I'm planning to write a play about a romance in a dark time, which actually happened during the rebellion of the Church of Hermes." Roland then briefly introduced the basic structure of the story. "I've heard that you're expert in plays about love and redemption, so let's make it a pilot project. If your play turns out to be a great success, I'll consider about your request next time I film the Magic Movie. How does that sound?"

After Roland seized the new and old Holy Cities, he told the public that the culprit of all the atrocious crimes was the false pope. The real pope had been killed a long time ago. Now, a new

church agent had been appointed and he would fully support Graycastle to fight the Battle of Divine Will.

After more than one year of advertisement, the public gradually accepted the "new history". Now it was time to further uncover the origin of the Battle of Faiths and the church. Once the masses learned the truth, they would view the new church as a completely separate organization from the usurper's and the church that had persecuted the witches. The new church, therefore, would become a part of Neverwinter's political body.

"Is the play you're talking about based on a true story?" Kajen asked. "Can I meet the two main characters in the play?"

"They're currently in the Kingdom of Wolfheart, waiting for rescue." Roland said, shrugging. "But I think you should know what 'based on' means..."

"Of course," Kajen confirmed with a nod. "The plays I wrote in the past are also based on royal legends and myths, and I had to avoid using any identifiable family names and family history, but..."

"But what...?"

Kajen hesitated for a moment and replied determinedly, "Your Majesty, although it's definitely a new experience for me, I would like to join your rescue team if you allow me to. I want to watch this operation. It'll be very helpful for me to understand their story."

"Even though this requires you to pay a visit to the Kingdom of Wolfheart?"

"I don't think I can picture those details in my head, and I don't want to miss the opportunity you've given me," Kajen said cordially. "I can assure you that I won't cause any trouble to your team. My health has not failed me yet, and I have my student to take care of me."

Chapter 1097: Friend and Old Acquaintance

After Kajen withdrew, Barov immediately rounded on Roland and said anxiously, "Your Majesty, why did you decline his request? He's an iconic figure of the play industry in Graycastle, and every troupe is eager to have him! I'm not saying the Star Flower Troupe isn't good, but Ms. May is, after all, not as influential as Kajen Fels. If Kajen joins our troupe, Star Flower would veritably become the most eminent troupe throughout the whole kingdom. With Kajen in the troupe, a great number of actors and actresses would come and join us. Then we wouldn't need to worry about being short staffed."

Roland cast him a sideways glance and said, "Haven't you heard of the saying that people usually don't care much about things they obtained very easily?"

"Um..." The governor was taken aback for a fraction of a second before he replied, "Forgive my ignorance, but who said that, or rather, in which book did you see it?"

"I said it," Roland said unblushingly. "This is common sense. He has been attracted to the Magic Movie, so he would definitely stay in Neverwinter for a while. Compared to a straight 'yes', a challenging task would motivate him to work harder. Perhaps, he would even thank me for giving him this opportunity. If I let him in right away, he would take it for granted, and that's the difference between a yes and no."

Roland stopped for a second and then continued, "Plus, May is Kajen's student. If Kajen joins the Star Flower Troupe, what would Star Flower Troupe become of? I don't mind him participating in filming, but I don't want him to act in a play. His presence, however, would pressure young actors to further improve their skills."

"Well... you're right," Barov said hesitantly. "But you allowed him

to go to the Kingdom of Wolfheart..."

"That's nothing," Roland cut in, "It's his own choice. I'm also curious about what play Kajen is going to make at this stage. As far as I know, he's already reached the pinnacle of his career. By the way, how's your statistic report going? If you have time to pry into other people's business, why not get your own work done?"

"Yes, Your Majesty... Please excuse me!" said Barov quickly, who bowed at once and retired from the parlor.

"You're acting more and more like a king, Your Majesty," Nightingale said as she revealed herself from behind and squinted at him.

"Haha... I'm flattered." It had been a while since Nightingale had addressed him in such a formal manner, and somehow Roland did not really like it. He said, "You don't need to talk to me with such formality, you know?"

"But I feel it isn't a very good idea to be too intimate," Nightingale instantly shot back while folding her arms. "'People usually don't care much about things they obtained very easily'. I didn't know you thought this way. I should be more careful in the future and set a boundary between us. Also, I'll certainly remind Anna to prevent someone from getting too full of himself. "

Roland could feel his forehead dampened with cold sweat. He said vaguely, "Well... um... um... anyway, people and the Magic Movie are two different things! Plus, I'm not the first person saying that..."

"But you agree with it," Nightingale grunted. "My magic power in my chest tells me that you accept at least 55% of the theory."

Roland mopped his forehead, wondering if Nightingale could now detect lies with such accuracy, and then he suddenly remembered the word "chest" she had mentioned. Agatha told him that witches' magic power was in a shape of a cyclone, but it was

not a physical entity. In reality, magic power spread all over one's body rather than clustering around a certain area.

"Did you really use your ability?" Roland questioned.

"Haha." Nightingale could not resist laughing. "You found out, but you did say that. If the other witches know what you're really thinking, what will they think of you? Will they start to think that you 'take them for granted' ?"

"Five Chaos Drinks," Roland blurted out, starting to bribe Nightingale.

"Ten, with different flavors," Nightingale negotiated as she licked her lips.

"It would raise suspicions if I give you too many..."

"Suspicious of what?"

"Well... someone will think it's unfair."

"Don't worry. I'll hide them well. Nobody will find them."

"How about eight? If you get them too easily, you'll..."

"Will what?"

"No, nothing. I have to think about it..."

...

In the end, Roland signed an "unequal treaty" at the cost of ten Chaos Drinks.

Watching Nightingale snacking on dried fish triumphantly, Roland shook his head in amusement.

By nightfall, Barov handed in the list of family visitors. He reported over the phone, "Ms. Scroll and I reviewed the family records and the copies of Power of Attorney. We've selected around 1,600 people for the first round of family visits to the Fertile Plains. Priority is given to family members. We're currently in the process of drafting a detailed proposal. If everything goes well, they'll be

taking off in two days."

"Very well. Go ahead with your plan," Roland said approvingly, feeling very pleased with the high work efficiency of the Administrative Office. He was proud of how well his prime minister was trained.

"As you command! But Your Majesty, one worker's family member is a witch."

"A witch?" Roland echoed, his brows going up.

"Yes, this worker is called Snaketooth, from the Longsong District. He used to be a Rat at Black Street, and the witch is Miss Paper."

"Paper?" Roland suddenly remembered that Paper had involved herself in a small dispute when Petrov had brought her here. Was that Snaketooth her friend?

"Do you want me to cross him out?" Barov pursued as Roland lapsed into a long silence. "After all, Miss Paper has completely cut off from her past now."

"Of course not," said Roland, coming out of his reverie, "She severed her relationship with her past job as a Rat, but not with her friend. Don't forget that the key to eliminating Rats is to educate and transform them. They shouldn't be treated any differently just because of their previous occupation."

"A worker who used to be a Rat at Black Street..." Roland's lips curled up into a smile as he sank into his thought. If he remembered correctly, Paper and that worker had not seen each other for nearly two years. Perhaps they had forgotten what the other looked like. Yet Snaketooth still put her name on the Power of Attorney. It sounded like a fascinating story.

"I'll let Paper know," Roland said in the end. "You take care of the rest."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

At a clearing to the southwest of Tower Station No. 1, the First Army was holding a memorial service.

Nearly 300 serried snow-white tombstones stood solemnly on a meadow. Although nobody was buried underneath, everyone rose to pay their respects, a sober and stern expression on their faces, as if their companions had been standing right in front of them, alive and well.

"Here lie the valiant soldiers who sacrificed themselves to defend Tower Station No.1."

"They did not retreat but fought fiercely against the ferocious enemies."

"Because they knew that Graycastle had got their back."

"They were the swords of His Majesty, the towering wall protecting the civilians."

"Their names will be engraved in our memories."

"Their dreams will be fulfilled by us."

"To the King of Graycastle, to the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"Salute!"

Iron Axe performed a military salute, and all the others followed.

Lightning landed quietly on a barrack.

She spied a familiar figure at the front.

That was the conductor of the "Blackriver".

Chapter 1098: The Guardian

After the group of soldiers dispersed, the old man returned to the train. Lightning flew into the cab from the rear window and landed silently on the floor of the compartment.

The old man stood in front of the dashboard, transfixed like a silent statue, gazing at what lay in his hand.

Watching his lonely back, Lightning wanted to console him, but words somehow abandoned her.

The old man did not see Lightning until she touched the half-open blind.

"Ah, you were the little girl the other day..." said the old man who blinked in surprise.

"My name is Lightning," Lightning said as she took a step back.
"Sorry, I..."

"I see. You came to comfort me, right?" The old man said, grinning. "That's OK. I'm not that old yet. I don't need a little girl to comfort me. To be honest, it's a little embarrassing. That's a convenient ability you have. You can go wherever you want."

Lightning was a little relieved after she noticed that the old man was not as disconsolate as she had thought. She said, "I, I'll knock before I come in next time."

"I'm not blaming you, child," said the old man as he took down a foldable desk off the wall and wiped it with his sleeve. "Come, sit here. I'll make you a cup of tea. This is the only thing I have here to entertain guests."

"Thank... you," said Lightning, as she slouched toward the table and sat down. On the dashboard lay a Neverwinter identification card.

"I'm Broocher, or you can call me my nickname, Mr. Howler. The

lads on the train all call me by that name." The old man placed a cup of hot tea on the table and asked, "Did you attend the memorial?"

Lightning nodded and then shook her head. "I just stopped by and watched for a few minutes..."

"That means you didn't lose any of your friends, which is good."

Lightning clutched the cup and asked, "Your son..."

"Oh, that was Robert, my third son. He died when they tried to seize the artillery," Broocher said placidly. "The commander says he was very brave."

"He was," Lightning muttered. She had heard everything about the battle from Sylvie. It took a great deal of courage to charge at the spearing demons with no firearms or the support of the God's Punishment Witches.

"My third son used to be the timidest among my four sons. When he was a miner, he never stood up for himself no matter how harsh his foreman treated him. He would only complain about him to me in tears," Broocher said with a sigh. "You must be wondering why I don't look very sad, aren't you?"

At a loss for words, the little girl stammered, "No, I..."

"That's OK," the old man consoled her. "I know this will come one day... but my three sons told me one thing once."

"What... did they say?"

"They said they wanted to defend Neverwinter and everything in their native town that they earned through their hard work." The old man sipped the tea and continued, "To be completely honest, I didn't understand at first and asked them why it had to be them instead of others."

Lightning was asking the same question within herself.

Broocher seemed to know what she was thinking. He answered,

"They said that others had made their sacrifices."

"Many people were killed during the battle against the demonic beasts when they were just members of the Militia. People died all the time when they fought against Duke Ryan and the church. If everybody relied on others, we would have been still working at the mine, living like animals," the old man said. "There's no battle without blood spilled. Everybody has his own turn. If nobody wanted to come forward, we would have been at the mercy of our enemy — that was what they told me."

"I'm not sure if my three sons are right, but I'm sure that this is their own choice." He took a deep breath and went on, "They were adults, and they knew what they were doing. That's enough for me. Compared to my eldest son who died of a chill, my third son would be remembered by the army forever. What do I have to be sad for?"

Lightning remembered what the conductor had said the other night. "They used to be as frail and weak as mice. However, after they joined the army, they changed a great deal. That's where my confidence in the First Army comes from. An army with people like that would not be so easily defeated."

"So that's the reason..." Lightning thought.

"By the way, I should thank you."

"Thank... me?" Lightning echoed in confusion.

"Yes," said the old man smilingly. "Without your prompt notification, we would have suffered a greater loss. You protected the First Army and the other son of mine in another way. I was wondering when I could meet you again and thought I probably would never see you in the future, but you appeared right behind me. It's nice to express my gratitude in person."

After the tea, Lightning waved goodbye to Broocher.

As she flew out of the train, through the window she saw the old

man return to the dashboard, grab that identification card and bury his face in his hands.

...

Maggie was hovering in midair when Lightning returned to the residential area. She pulled Lightning into a rib-cracking hug as soon as she saw her and said accusingly, "Where have you been, coo? Why did you come back so late, coo? Did you forget what day it is today, coo?"

"Um, what day is it?"

"It's the day Lorgar is discharged from the hospital!" Maggie exclaimed as she descended on Lightning's head. "Let's go to the hospital, coo!"

"Ah... alright, alright. I see. Be quiet," Lightning said as she steadied the wobbly pigeon before zooming toward the center of the encampment. The Tower Station No. 1 underwent significant changes after the night attack. All the facilities, including the barracks and the hospital, had been relocated to the underground, except the platform, the yard and the watchtower. In this way, they were able to extend the defensive line to the outer ring of the encampment while at the same time monitoring the interior. Even if the demons launched a similar attack again, they would be able to minimize its impact.

Lightning and Maggie soon caught sight of the wolf girl.

"Hey," Lorgar said as she shook her ears. "Long time no see."

"It has been just a week," Lightning said, relieved to see the wolf girl in high spirits again. Lightning had been very concerned about Lorgar, because based on Maggie's description, Lorgar had been barely alive when she had been sent to the hospital.

"I feel time go so slow, probably because I've been sleeping all day," Lorgar said while stretching her body. "Nana insists that I should stay at the hospital for a week. If I stayed here for another

week, I probably wouldn't need her treatment."

According to the Taquila witches, witches generally had a higher tolerance to the side effect of sleeping ferns than ordinary people. As such, to save Nana's magic power, they usually put themselves to sleep when receiving Nana's treatment.

"You really have monstrous self-repair ability, just like Lady Ashes, coo!" Maggie remarked while flapping her wings.

"Um... After I talked to Miss Andrea, I feel this is nothing to brag about," Lorgar mumbled in a hushed voice.

"Coo?"

"No, nothing," The wolf girl muttered as she walked up to Lightning and suddenly picked her up under her arms.

"Oi, Oi... what are you doing? Put me down," Abashed, Lightning yelled. "Somebody's watching us!"

"Sylvie told me everything, everything you did."

"I..."

"See? You can do it as long as you try hard," Lorgar said as she pressed Lightning into her bosom. "This is the captain we love."

Lightning stopped struggling, feeling warmth wash over her body. After a moment of silence, she murmured, "But I'm still a coward."

"You admitting this to me indicates you've already made progress." Lorgar put down Lightning and said, "You aren't going to leave us again, are you?"

Lightning's eyes darted from the wolf girl to Maggie, then nodded gently and said, "No."

The moment she made her promise, she felt a heavy burden press onto her shoulders.

However, she did not feel intimidated.

Instead, she somehow felt a sense of security.

"Coo?" Maggie asked in bewilderment, her head lopsided. "What are you talking about, coo?"

"We're discussing the upcoming celebration," Lorgar said as she straightened up. "Since we're all safe and sound, shouldn't we have a drink?"

"Celebrate, coo!! Celebrate, coo!" Maggie rejoined in excitement.

"Hey, hang on..." Lightning said hesitantly. "I have to patrol the campsite tonight."

"That's OK. You just provide drinks and we'll drink them for you," Lorgar said, her tail high up in the air. "This is what a captain should offer to her team, isn't it?"

Chapter 1099: I Like You and Everybody

The following day, a message from Neverwinter stirred the entire construction team at the front.

King Roland had granted family visits to all the laborers who had been working for more than three months. They would have a day off to spend this special day with their families whom they had been longing to see. Their family members would travel from Neverwinter to the terminus station located at the Misty Forest to meet them.

Everyone was grateful for King Roland's kindness and compassion. The workers chanted "Long live the king" after they heard the news and worked even harder during the remainder of the day.

Snaketooth was one of them.

In fact, when the foreman had told him the news, he had literally goggled at the list in disbelief for a few minutes.

He gazed at the bottom of the list where the name "Paper" lay, his head completely blank.

"Hey, are you OK with the arrangement or not?" Snaketooth still clearly remembered that the foreman had pressed him for an answer impatiently. Indeed, he had stared at the list for quite a while before signing the paper. Snaketooth grinned every time he thought of that moment. "Just a heads up. If you disagree, you can put down another person's name, and the Administrative Office would make an inquiry to him or her. However, if your application is rejected, you'll lose your vacation."

The foreman obviously wanted him to approve the list right away to save his work, but Snaketooth knew he did not understand his feeling.

Why would he want to reject it. On the very contrary, he wanted

to give the official at the Administrative Office drafting this list a big kiss.

"I agree. I totally agree!"

"You should have said that earlier rather than gaping like an idiot," the foreman grumbled scathingly while casting him a sideways glance. He went to look for the next person on the list after Snaketooth signed.

Snaketooth stood rooted there, staring at the hand with which he had put his signature in a daze.

He still felt that everything was like a dream, a dream he hoped that would last forever.

He did not have the courage to say hello to Paper in Neverwinter because he was afraid of being rejected. Paper was now a member of the Witch Union and had become much more beautiful than the frail girl he had known. If Paper did not want to associate herself with a former Rat like him anymore, his intrusion would only disturb her peaceful life.

When he saw Paper's name appear on the list, he knew the Administrative Office had confirmed that she agreed to come and visit him.

Nothing could be more exciting than spending time alone with Paper. He was happy that Paper did not reject him.

Snaketooth waited for the family visiting day in great anxiety and excitement.

Since the train could only carry around 100 people at a time due to its limited transportation capacity, Snaketooth had to wait for a week for his turn, although Paper was on the list of the first round of the visitors.

"Hey man, it's your turn today?"

"Look at you! It's a girl, isn't it?"

"Don't stay up too late!"

Snaketooth went all red as his fellow workers jested. He dashed out of the room in embarrassment.

He heaved a deep sigh of relief after finally boarding the train. Anyway, he would be meeting Paper in two hours.

The train conductor reminded them of the rules pertaining to family visits every now and then. For example, visitors were not allowed to go beyond the guarding zone and had to leave before 8:00 PM. They also should follow the First Army's instructions in the event of an emergency. Snaketooth had learned all the rules by heart, as some returned visitors had already told him.

With a long, shrill whistle, the train staggered to a stop at the terminus station at the Misty Forest.

"Get off the train. Line up and don't push!" The train staff hollered. "It isn't grocery shopping. There's no need to fear that the food would be sold out."

The crowd erupted into a laughter.

Snaketooth felt his heart thumping in his throat.

He could barely contain himself.

He had pictured his meeting with Paper numerous times in his head and had also rehearsed his speech over and over again. However, he was now groping for words like a dunce.

When that pretty girl appeared in front of him, Snaketooth forgot all about his prepared speech. No words came out of his mouth. He simply grinned at her, feeling very stupid.

"You're living at Neverwinter. That's awesome!" The girl trotted to him and held his hands. She neither hesitated nor showed any reluctance to touch him. Everything was just like what it had been like two years ago. Her bright smile instantly eased his mind.

At that moment, Snaketooth believed that he had made the right

choice to come to Neverwinter.

...

"So, you came here after the Longsong District was merged?"

The pair of the two walked abreast along a path leading to the depth of the forest far away from the boisterous encampment so that they could have some privacy. Paper appeared to have a lot to say as if she wanted to fill in the gap between them. Snaketooth, on the other hand, answered every question Paper asked. They were now more like friends than a superior and a subordinate.

"The entire Rat organization has been uprooted. There were many job postings on the square, so I applied for one. If I continued to be a Rat, I would have got in trouble," Snaketooth said while nodding. "Tigerclaw and I decided to work in Neverwinter, as the pay is higher here. Plus..."

"It's closer to you," he left the remaining words unsaid.

"No wonder I didn't find you guys. I didn't know you already left there," Paper remarked with a mixed feeling.

"You went back to... the Longsong District later?"

"I asked someone to look for you," the girl said slowly. "After I learned that the entire Dark Corner Alley was torn down, I thought you left the Western Region."

"Oh... I see."

"But why didn't you come to see me after you came to Neverwinter?" Paper questioned.

"Well... it's a long story." Snaketooth said on a cough. "Tigerclaw and I had nothing at that time. We didn't have a permanent residence and we worked all day, so we kind of forgot."

It was such a poor excuse. Nobody could ever completely forget a person for two years. That simply meant he did not care about her. However, Snaketooth would never tell Paper that he was trying to

dodge her.

Fortunately, Paper did not probe into the matter. She said, "Same here. I was so busy at the beginning after I moved to Neverwinter. I have to help the construction team to make cement settle faster. I have to assist Ms. Agatha, and I also have to help the chemical plant to manufacture various strange stuff," Paper said as she counted things off on her fingers. "His Majesty says my ability can accelerate reaction processes and increase bond energies. I wonder how he knew it. According to the book, those particles are even smaller than sesame. Can you imagine that? If an atom is as big as the Longsong Theater, its nucleus is smaller than a walnut..."

Snaketooth did not understand a single word Paper was saying but he kept nodding, pretending to be interested in the topic. For a split second, he noticed Paper's change and the difference between them. He looked at her with utmost attentiveness, his eyes flitting from her glistening eyes and long eyelashes to the delicate tip of her nose and moving lips, fascinated by everything about her.

Snaketooth was almost about to confess to her.

"By the way," After talking about her own experience, Paper switched the subject, "after I learned that you were in Neverwinter, I asked Ms. Scroll to look up the files and found that Sunflower and the others also came here. That's so nice. We can hang out together in the future..."

Snaketooth was not paying attention to the latter half her sentence. He was too occupied by his own thought.

So he confessed his love.

"I like you, Paper!" he blurted out.

Immediately, he realized what he had done.

His heart was beating suffocatingly in his chest. An indescribable nervousness prevailed him.

For a moment, Snaketooth regretted being so impulsive.

However, to his surprise, Paper replied to him at once.

She answered brightly with a smile, "I like you too, and also everybody."

Chapter 1100: Afternoon Tea in the Forest

...

"Did she... really say that at that time?" Wendy burst into a laugh after Leaf recounted Paper's story. She asked, "What about the young man called Snaketooth? Didn't he say anything?"

"Just laughed like a child with her together," Leaf said as she shook her head. "He probably used up all the courage he could muster to communicate his feelings. It wasn't an easy task after all."

"I thought so too," Wendy said, smiling even more broadly. "It's so good... to be young."

"Is it OK to eavesdrop on our fellow witch though?" Leaf questioned as she transformed from a green shadow into her original appearance.

"We weren't eavesdropping. We were simply doing what His Majesty told us to," Wendy protested, swelling up dignifiedly. "He asked us to have an eye on both of them, so obviously we should know about their topic of discussion, shouldn't we?"

That sounded quite reasonable.

"Besides, would you choose not to listen to their conversation if His Majesty didn't ask you to?" Wendy asked, staring at Leaf smilingly.

"Um..." Leaf said while clearing her throat. She curled up her lips and gave an affirmative answer, "Yes, I still would."

Both of them broke into laughter after exchanging a look with each other.

Leaf waved her hand. Soon, a giant vine rose from the ground and sent Wendy and her slowly to the treetops. Shortly afterwards, the dense branches and twigs below spread out, intertwined and

converged again. A moment later, a balcony built with green leaves appeared.

An endless sea of trees and a vast meadow leading to the Dragonspine Mountains suddenly came into their views.

Leaf used to build similar tree cabins back in the Witch Cooperation Association to shelter the witches from pouring rain and muddy roads, but it used to take her a lot of time to create one. To save her magic power, the cabins were always the shabbiest, smallest of the kind, with the shape of a chrysalis, and they could not always accommodate everyone.

But now, she could not only build a balcony effortlessly but could also conjure recliners and a coffee table. She also conjured two cups of light golden flower tea, which sparkled in the sunlight on the coffee table.

"Did you make it?" Wendy asked as she sniffed the cups. The tea smelled good.

"Yes. I used morning dews, honey and sugarcane to make it, with some fresh jasmine flower buds as well," Leaf answered while nodding. "It isn't as tasty as Chaos Drinks, but you can have as much tea as you want."

"You've become stronger and stronger," Wendy remarked impressively. "People say Anna is a true genius of our century, but I think you're just as powerful as her. Probably one day, you can control all the forests in the world and spread your mind throughout the whole continent, provided that you live long enough..."

"Based on my current status, I can't do that," Leaf said with a wave, smiling. "It would take nearly ten years for me to merge with the entire Misty Forest. By the time I'm able to leave here, I'm probably an old witch."

"Nobody knows," Wendy said as she sipped the tea. "Agatha told

me that witches and their magic power are interdependent on each other. The more powerful a witch is, the longer lifespan she'll have. The Transcendents might have still been alive if they weren't killed in the war." Wendy gazed up at the sky and said, "You're probably stronger than them. Perhaps, you can survive all of us."

Leaf fell silent. There was a hint of melancholy in her eyes, which Wendy did not notice.

"Also, our appearances have something to do with our magic power too." Wendy paused for a second and then continued, "Pasha has confirmed that the legendary Queen of Starfall City, Alice, was divinely beautiful." At these words, Wendy turned around and rested her eyes on Leaf. "Right... you do look a bit different now. I mean... when you descended from the treetops, you looked like a goddess of forests for a moment. I'm envious."

Leaf rolled her eyes and said, "This doesn't sound like something the kind, caring Wendy I know would say."

"That's because I didn't really think about these problems before," Wendy replied with a smile. "I was too focused on our survival to reflect upon other trifles, such as what our magic power can achieve, what our future would become of, and how magic power would affect our physical appearances."

"Makes sense," Leaf agreed while twitching her lips. "So now you've started to study the impact of magic power on your appearance. Let me guess... do you have a crush on someone?"

"That's different. You're just a little younger than me, aren't you? Are you not worried that you'll end up being all alone like me?"

"Forget about the age. I already have a forest. What else do I need? But I have my own way to know what you want. I supply all Honey's animal messengers."

"Unfortunately, as the superintendent of the Witch Union, I review every single article she writes."

Time passed by quickly as the pair teased each other over the afternoon tea.

Leaf finally steered the subject to the business when the sun started to sink behind the mountain in the west. She asked, "So, are you leaving soon?"

"Yes." Wendy got to her feet and said, "I have to escort Anna back. As the 'Seagull' doesn't work at night, we have to take off before four o' clock."

"You'll miss Paper and her beau's bonfire party then."

Unlike other family members, Paper took a flight to the front instead of traveling by train. As the departure time of the glider was fixed and they certainly could not leave Paper at the front alone either, she had to get there right on time.

"I don't have a choice," Wendy said resignedly while spreading out her hands. "We can't afford to waste too much time on the commute. It isn't safe and Neverwinter needs the glider."

"I'll let her know it's time to go," Leaf said as she transformed into the spirit form again.

"Thank you."

Leaf submerged in the sea of trees and reappeared in front of Wendy a few seconds later.

"OK, done. She'll meet you at the airport. I think she should be bidding farewell to her friend now. Let me transport you there."

Wendy nodded and turned around to wait for the balcony to descend.

"By the way..."

Leaf suddenly spoke in a quiet voice.

"Yes?"

"Ah, no," Leaf said hesitantly, "nothing."

Wendy took a breath, wheeled around and said gently, "Speak out. I'm here to listen."

"I'm just..."

"Just what?"

"Just a bit..." Leaf mumbled while clenching her fists. She suddenly, however, stood transfixed to the spot, looking over Wendy's head and locked her eyes on the northern side of the forest.

Perceiving the shock and surprise on her face, Wendy also wheeled around to see what had happened.

Several tendrils of dark smoke curled up from the forest and spread out like a veil.

"Is the forest... on fire?"

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